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FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION THROUGH INTERACTION

- AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY -

por

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To the teachers and the students

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of this study is to investigate how interaction can influence the acquisition of a foreign language. The data were collected in two low-intermediate groups of English through observation of classes, audio and video recordings, and interviews with the participants. The analysis of the data was based on the Interaction Hypothesis for language acquisition (Ellis, 1990), with the identification of the instances of negotiation of meaning which occurred during the classes. The activities carried out by the groups are described and analyzed as to the degree of negotiation of meaning promoted. The results show the importance of oral activities carried out in pairs or groups, with emphasis on activities in which learners have to exchange information with a common goal. The teacher's feedback

to learner's production is argued to be essential to assure the quality of the output produced. During the classes, the choice of LI or L2, for which the rules are established by the teacher, is reflected in the interaction of the group and in the behavior of the students. Code switching is seen to have different functions in the interaction of the group and in the degree of asymmetry of the teacher-student relationship. Although the use of L2 increases this asymmetry and strengthens the teacher's authority, this possible negative effect is more than compensated for by the increase in opportunities for negotiation of meaning. This, according to the Interaction Hypothesis, should result in more opportunities for acquisition to take place.

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A AQUISIÇÃO DE LÍNGUA ESTRANGEIRA ATRAVÉS DA INTERAÇÃO

- UM ESTUDO ETNOGRÁFICO -

RESUMO

O objetivo deste trabalho é investigar como a interação pode influenciar a aquisição de língua estrangeira. Os dados foram coletados em dois grupos de inglês de nível intermediário, através da observação de aulas, gravações em audio e video e entrevistas com os participantes. A análise dos dados está baseada na Hipótese Interativa para a aquisição de segunda língua (Ellis 1990), com a identificação dos exemplos de negociação de significado que ocorreram durante as aulas. As atividades feitas pelos grupos são descritas e analisadas para avaliar o grau de negociação de significado que promoveram. Os resultados mostram a importância de atividades orais em pares e em grupos, com ênfase para as atividades nas quais os alunos têm que trocar informações com um objetivo comum. A avaliação que o professor dá à produção do aluno é considerada essencial para assegurar a qualidade desta produção. Durante as aulas, a escolha entre L1 ou L2, cujas regras são estabelecidas pelo professor, reflete na interação do grupo e no comportamento dos alunos. Esta mudança de códigos desempenha diferentes funções na interação do grupo e no grau de assimetria da relação professor-aluno. Embora o uso de L2 aumente essa assimetria e fortaleça a autoridade do professor, esse provável efeito negativo é mais do que compensado pelo aumento de oportunidades para que ocorra negociação de significado. Isto,

segundo a Hipótese Interativa, deve resultar em maior oportunidade para que a aquisição aconteça.

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TRANSCRIPT CONVENTIONS

S1	one student
Ss	students
T	teacher
Me	researcher
( )	explanation
[ ]	incomprehensible
underlined	emphasis
CAPITAL	strong emphasis

FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION THROUGH INTERACTION

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INTRODUCTION

Even though learners may have the same motivation, positive attitudes, or critical needs for learning a language, they may have different capacities for language acquisition. In spite of the great efforts of researchers to understand why some learners are unsuccessful while others can master a foreign language, definite answers regarding the acquisition of another language are yet to be found. However, in the last decades, research carried out in the classroom has helped to identify some features of the foreign language acquisition process.

Many researchers and teachers today agree that the classroom has to provide opportunities for learners to take part in meaningful social interaction, so that they can "discover the linguistic and sociolinguistic rules necessary for second-language comprehension and production" (Pica 1987:4). When learners study English in Brazil, this meaningful social interaction has to happen in the classroom, since the classroom is usually the only environment where learners have the opportunity to produce the foreign language.

During my experience as a teacher of English as a foreign language I have perceived that a class which provides opportunities for the students to interact among themselves leads to a better and more natural oral production. I decided then to

investigate how interaction can influence the acquisition of a foreign language. The Interaction Hypothesis for language acquisition stresses the importance of comprehension and production of L2 as essential to the internalization of its rules and structure (Pica, Holliday, Lewis, Berducci & Newman 1991:344).

This study examines social interaction and negotiation of L2 in the classroom. Negotiation of meaning refers to moments when learners and their interlocutors, because of a shared need and a desire to understand each other, modify and restructure their discourse. They negotiate meaning in an attempt to find a way to comprehend each other clearly (Long 1983, Long & Porter 1985, Allwright 1984, Doughty & Pica 1986, Pica 1987, Pica, Young & Doughty 1987, Pica, et al. 1991).

Recently, ethnography has become of interest to linguists who want to study learners' behavior in its social context. The second-language classroom is seen as a social context in which learning takes place; therefore, ethnography is an important means to understand what happens in the classroom. This study differs from previous studies on negotiation of meaning because it examines negotiation of meaning within an ethnographic approach, without interfering in the structure of the class. Negotiation of meaning is studied as it occurs naturally in the activities prepared by the teacher. All the participants of this study have a common L1 - Portuguese, so the influence of code switching in the interaction of the group is also studied here.

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1

presents a review of ethnographic research in the L2 classroom and the methodology used in this study. Chapter 2 describes the importance of interaction in the Input Hypothesis, the Output Hypothesis and the Interaction Hypothesis for language acquisition and explains the difference between social interaction and negotiation of meaning. In Chapter 3, the activities carried out during four classes are analyzed and the level of negotiation of meaning promoted by each one is determined by a subjective rating scale. The influence of code switching in the interaction of the groups is presented in Chapter 4, including an analysis of the role of the teacher in the establishment of the rules for the use of L1 and L2 in the classroom, the behavior of the students concerning the use of L1 and L2, and the reasons for the code switching. In Chapter 5 different results are discussed together to arrive at conclusions concerning the influence of interaction in foreign language acquisition.

CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH IN THE SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

1.1. Language Classroom Research

Of the many existing reviews of the research in the L2 classroom, one of the most detailed was made by Allwright in the book Observation in the Language Classroom (1988). His book presents a chronological review of the last thirty years. Language teaching research conducted in the sixties was a consequence of the research carried out in other subjects. It was typically longitudinal experimental; researchers expected measurement of learners proficiency, by means of pre and post-tests, to constitute the data of their research projects. At that time researchers investigated the quality of language teaching methods, so that they could determine what constituted effective teaching. The results of the investigations were used in the training of beginning teachers.

Long (1980:1) considers that the studies conducted then "were methodological comparisons which, it was hoped, would evaluate them [the methods]". According to Allwright and Bailey (1991:7), researchers believed that what happened in the classroom, and learners' improvement were defined by the method used in teaching. The main concern was to determine the right method to be used.

As Ellis (1990:10) points out, the studies carried out in the sixties were difficult to control; since the researchers were not present in the field they could not control what exactly was

happening in class. Two studies of that time were especially relevant: Scherer and Wertheimer (cited in Ellis 1990:10) compared the efficacy of grammar-translation vs. that of audiolingualism, and the Pennsylvania Project (cited in Ellis 1990:10) was a longitudinal study that investigated three different methods: grammar-translation, audio lingual, and cognitive. Both studies failed to demonstrate significant differences or superiority in promoting L2 learning in any of the methods studied.

In his review of L2 classroom research, Ellis (1990:14) suggests that the new approach in the seventies was a result of the disappointment in the search for a method good enough to be prescribed in teacher training. Researchers began to question the validity of longitudinal comparative studies and opted for small-scale observational studies of classroom behavior.

Allwright and Bailey (1991:9) point out that two changes were involved in the development of L2 research. The first was a change from prescription of a method to description of the classroom. The second was a change from investigating "techniques" of teaching to investigating the real "process" of a class. These two modifications led to an attempt to investigate exactly what happens in second language classes.

Long (1980:3) defines the investigation of classroom language learning as "research on second language learning and teaching, all or part of whose data are derived from the observation or measurement of the classroom performance of teachers and students". It is important to note that Long includes measurement

in this kind of research. His goal is to use observational research to test a theory of second language acquisition that could be generalized.

The reviews of the literature concerning the process descriptive approach of the eighties show that the investigations carried out in this field can have different classifications. Gaies (1983:206) grouped the studies conducted in the classroom into three areas: (1) The linguistic environment, with studies about the linguistic input available to learners in the classroom; (2) Patterns of classroom interaction, with research on the interactional adjustments and interactional patterns of the L2 classroom; (3) Error treatment, with investigations about the way learners' errors are treated and the significance of errors in acquisition.

Long (1980:3) categorizes classroom process research according to the methodology used: those involving some kind of interaction analysis and those describable as forms of anthropological observation.

A different classification is given by Allwright (1983:196), who points out that investigators involved in the description of classroom process have adopted two different viewpoints. The ones with a sociological view on education see the language classroom as a socially constructed event that teachers and students produce through their interactive work. They see the lesson as an event produced by the interaction of all participants, not conducted by the teacher alone. On the other hand, more language oriented researchers go to the classroom to observe the

linguistic input provided by the teacher's talk. Allwright considers that both viewpoints, the sociological orientation and the linguistic orientation, can be complementary.

A very complete review of the state of the art in classroom process research was written by Mitchell (1985). She divides the studies into three broad groups: (1) Linguistic and discursive analysis of teacher talk; (2) Linguistic and Discursive analysis of teacher-student interaction, including error treatment, classroom management, questioning strategies, and metalanguage; (3) Classroom discourse features, which include learners' interlanguage, communication strategies, turn taking and code switching.

Mitchell observes that this is an area with a large variety of research issues as well as a diversity in the methods used to investigate them. According to her, some researchers are concerned with the process of L2 acquisition while others want to investigate interlanguage development as part of the research in L2 linguistic universals. There are also researchers who study the classroom as a basis for instruction in teacher training courses, or with a concern for the social and cultural issues involved in the classroom.

The classroom studies conducted in the seventies and eighties are grouped by Ellis (1990:11) into three categories: (1) Classroom process research; (2) The study of classroom interaction and L2 acquisition; and (3) The study of formal instruction and L2 acquisition. It is interesting to note that Ellis reviews only those studies which provide a basis for

building a particular theory of classroom L2 learning.

1.2. Ethnographic Research

The term ethnography was originally used in anthropology to describe the study of the behavior of a group of people in a naturally occurring setting. The ethnographer wants to describe and interpret what the group does in this particular setting, how the members of the group interact, and the way they understand what they are doing (Watson-Gegeo 1988:575). In order to make the description and interpretation of the group selected to investigate, the ethnographer observes of the behavior, interaction, social rules, and cultural values of the group.

Recently ethnography has become of interest to applied linguists who want to study language learners' behavior in its social context. The second/foreign-language classroom in seen as a social context in which learning takes place; therefore, ethnography is an important means to increase understanding of what happens in the second/foreign-language classroom.

Ethnographic research can be defined by the following principles: naturally occurring settings, the use of research questions, holistic analysis, microethnography, emic analysis, and triangulation. As these principles have guided my ethnographic study, I will briefly review them here.

Research questions are studied in the naturally occurring setting, where the researcher cannot interfere or manipulate the actions of the group. The researcher needs to be present and observe the behavior of the participants.

According to Zaharlick & Green (1991), ethnographers do not begin their research with a predefined view of the question they will investigate. The research questions and hypotheses should arise from the data collected, meaning that the researcher should not start the study with a pre-defined hypothesis in mind, "in order to obtain as much information as possible and to avoid any manipulation or interference in the research context" (Selinger & Shohamy, 1989:116). Erickson (1990) also points out that it is difficult to enter the research field with established methods, since the environment will bring the questions worth studying.

Contrary to this approach, some authors believe that theory is important to guide the observer, to whom "evidences are likely to be significant in answering research questions posed at the beginning of the study and developed in the field" (Watson-Gegeo 1988:578). When I started my investigation, I felt the necessity to focus my observation in order to have a framework to make sense of my observations. Michael Stubbs (1976:18) points out that observations become interesting when we can relate them to general principles of language use in a social context. I decided, then, to define three initial questions to motivate my investigation; and to adopt a theory of language acquisition to guide my analysis.

The researcher must also have a holistic perspective; that is, the data have to be analyzed as part of a context. This is the macro analysis of the event, which tries to relate each fact to the whole system of which it is a part (Watson-Gegeo 1988).

Erickson (1990) called microethnography the study of recorded

events that allows the observation of micro elements of the event, for example the discourse analysis of the participants. Other researchers (Coracini 1992, Moraes 1990, Rech 1992) have recently relied, for the collection of data, on events recorded in audio and video in a small and closed context. A recorded event can be analyzed as many times as desired by the researcher, so that the context and the interaction of the participants can be studied with precision.

An important point to be made in ethnographic research is that researchers must obtain the meaning the event has to the participants themselves. This is the \emic\ analysis of the event. Watson-Gegeo (1988:580) explains that the ethnographer has to include the "participants' perspectives and interpretation of behavior, events and situations" so that the researcher has an opinion from within, which will point out the characteristics of the event that are significant to the participants.

Another aspect of ethnographic research is the value of multiple perspectives in data collection and analysis -triangulation (Allwright and Bailey, 1991). Triangulation means that researchers should use a variety of methods for data collection, and several different perspectives in the analysis of the same data. This methodological technique gives validity and reliability to the investigation. Erickson (1981, cited in Van Lier 1988:56) claims that asking and watching are the two main sources of data. Asking can include interviews and questionnaires, while watching includes field observation, field notes, and analysis of tapes. Additional sources are transcripts,

documents (e.g. written exercises, tests), and diaries.

1.3. Relevant Case Studies

Three ethnographic studies carried out in Brazil are reviewed here. All of them analyzed classroom interaction and participants' discourse, and two of them, the two involving foreign language classes, were also interested in the methodology used by the teacher.

A study conducted by Coracini (1992) discussed classroom interaction in a class of French for Specific Purposes (FSP). According to Coracini, classroom interaction is determined by two aspects: first, the methodology and material used by the teacher and second, the students' and teacher's previous knowledge, which will shape their cultural and didactic habits. The study was developed to investigate participants' resistance to a methodological approach (FSP) different from the one they were used to.

The research involved twenty students enrolled in a course of FSP at the Universidade de São Paulo. Only one class was observed and audio recorded, and during that time students read two texts. After the class, the participants described the processes they had used to read the texts.

Coracini expected the class to be centered on the students' necessities, since this was the methodological approach of the school. However, the observation of the participants during the class, as well as the analysis of the discourse produced, showed that teacher-student interaction was dominated by the authority

of the teacher, and that the methodology used in class was based on deep prejudices about reading in a foreign language.

Moraes (1990) carried out a study based on the supposition that English teaching in Brazil illustrates a dissociation between theoretical issues and practice. The research was conducted in two parts: first, a teacher answered a questionnaire about the theoretical approach adopted by her; in the second part, the researcher analyzed, based on video recording of the teacher's class, how she actually applied the concepts detected in the questionnaire. The teacher's comments about her classes were also used to complement the analysis. The dissociation between the theory the teacher had in mind and her practice was confirmed in the analysis. Based on these results, Moraes emphasizes the importance of training future teachers in self-assessment.

A study conducted by Rech (1992) involved a group of forty students in 5th grade in a public school in Florianópolis. She investigated the conflict between students' and teachers' expectations about classroom interaction, based on the idea that the same linguistic code can have different interpretations for the different participants involved in the interaction (Gumperz cited in Rech 1992:1).

Rech chose the 5th grade because it is the first time the students are confronted with several different teachers, each one having his/her own expectations. The teachers, one from Geography and one from Mathematics, were chosen due to the distinct kinds of discourse adopted in class. Rech defined two styles of

teacher: the conversational and the formal.

The analysis of results showed that the differences in interaction promoted by different teachers make interactional performance difficult for the students, affecting also their task accomplishment/execution. Students are afraid of performing the "wrong role" and become passive participants in the interaction, doing only what the teacher expects them to do. The use and abuse of power is also analyzed and pointed out as one of the causes of the high attrition in this school.

1.4. Research Questions

Ethnography was chosen for the investigation, in this study, of three initial questions:

1. How does interaction take place in the foreign language classroom?
2. Which classroom activities favor interaction?
3. Can the relation between interaction and language acquisition be perceived by learners?

These questions were selected to guide my observation, but ethnographic studies must continually have their questions and plans adapted to the conditions of the setting as the studies progress (Zaharlick and Green, 1991). In my case, after two months of observation I could perceive the importance of the use of Portuguese and English for the interaction of the groups. I decided then to focus my attention on this aspect, which became one of my research questions. At the same time, it became clear that my questions were too broad to be approached in this study.

At the end of my project, I had the following two questions to investigate in the classroom:

1. Which classroom activities favor interaction?
2. When does interaction occur in English and when does it occur in Portuguese?

1.5. Methodology: The school and the participants

The classes chosen for the study were two sections of English 5 of the Extra Curricular Course at UFSC. My choice of this course was due to my familiarity with the coordinators and teachers of the course. English 5 was selected because students at this level (low-intermediate) can already use the foreign language to communicate during the class, and also because the teachers were receptive to my presence and to the recording equipment in their classes.

I selected two sections of the same level in order to have two groups with the same linguistic level and context, but with different participants. I wanted to compare how two groups which were similar in a macroanalysis would differ in a microanalysis.

The sections had two 90-minute classes a week, totaling 45 hours during the semester. The textbook used in the Extra Curricular English Course was the Strategies Series by Brian Abbs and Ingrid Freebain (Longman). In English 5, the first eight units of volume 3 - Developing Strategies - are covered. The teachers are allowed to use additional sources, which both did. In the Extra Curricular Course students have to reach a grade of 60 out of 100 and attend 75% of the classes in order to pass.

The rooms used by both sections were large with a high ceiling. In front of the blackboard there was a small stage where the teacher's desk stood. The teachers always had the students sit in a semicircle, a convenient arrangement for the language classroom because all students can see the teacher, the blackboard, and the rest of the class. Moreover, students always have a classmate (or two) beside them to interact with. Sitting in a semicircle also gives the group the opportunity to interact as a whole, since everybody can see and talk to everybody.

Attrition is not considered a problem by the coordination of the Extra Curricular Course. The course is part of a program offered by the university, so they can use the university facilities without any cost. Thus, students pay a low fee for the whole course at enrolment, and every semester there are more candidates than the number of vacancies available for the courses. With these characteristics, the drop out rate in the Extra Curricular Course is not a worry since next semester many students will try for a vacancy again.

Before the teacher's arrival in the room, students of both sections usually talked in Portuguese. They would often ask me questions about my research. The arrival of the teacher meant a code switch from Portuguese to English. Several students were habitually late, so every class was interrupted during the first ten minutes by the arrival of the latecomers.

In my discussion of the two sections studied, I will refer to them as Section A and Section B and to the teachers as Teacher A and Teacher B.

Section A was observed during the months of April, May, and June of 1993. This section began with an enrollment of 22 adolescents and adults (11 women and 11 men) and ended with a drop out rate of 22% . Of the 17 students who completed the course only one failed. This student had been a worry for the teacher from the beginning of the course because he did not have the same level as the other students.

During the term there was a strike at the university and the building used by the Extra Curricular Course was closed during three weeks. The teacher and students of English 5 were persistent enough to find a new room, contact all the students and have class while almost all the other sections stopped.

This situation led to some changes. The new room was smaller, and in a place unfamiliar to the students. As some students had traveled due to the strike, the group was smaller during this period, and the teacher took advantage of this to introduce some supplementary tasks not in the textbook. It was a time for more interactive activities.

During the whole course, the teacher assigned the "writing" activities of the book as homework. The classes were motivated with communicative and interactive activities from other sources. The teacher supplemented the grammar topics of the text book with extra exercises from Grammar in Use by Raymond Murphy.

The group was given a mid-term test and a final exam. The latter consisted of a written part and an oral part, where students in pairs discussed a topic given by the teacher. Students had previously prepared a list of ten topics from which

the teacher chose one at random at the time of the test.

Teacher A had 6 years of English teaching experience. At that time she was in her first semester of study in the English graduate program of the same university and very interested in the study of second language acquisition.

Due to the strike in the first semester, the second semester Extra Curricular classes started only on September 9th. This meant two changes for all the sections: a reduction in the number of classes and having classes until December 23rd. Section B was observed for the first time during one class in October as part of my plan for this study. The following week Teacher B faced a personal problem which forced her to take three weeks off, and I replaced her in six classes. I considered this time the necessary period when participants and researcher get to know and trust each other. I had the opportunity to become familiar with all the students, and I told them that I would continue my project when their teacher came back. An ethnographic study allows the research to adapt to the new situations that may arise within the context in focus. I did not intend to be Section B's teacher, but that became the reality I would study. It gave me the opportunity to see the event as a different participant, the teacher. On November 8th I resumed the observation of the classes, which ended on December 20th.

At the beginning of the course, Section B had 28 students. By the end, the section had decreased to 23 students; with a drop out rate of 18%. All of these students passed to the next level.

The classroom was big enough for the group. Students were

asked to sit in a semi circle, and I noticed that they always sat in the same place in the circle. As a result, most students had the same partner for pair work during the whole course.

In December the hot weather and the sun became a problem for this group. They had classes at sunset in a warm classroom receiving the sun's direct rays. All the participants complained about having classes in that classroom: they said that the sun light disturbed their vision and that the hot temperature of the place made them feel lazy. Let's see what Teacher B said about the classroom:

> Mas o problema é que o sol bate o tempo inteiro ali, então se fecha a cortina fica muito abafado e se deixa a cortina aberta o sol fica batendo na cara da gente... mas é uma sala péssima, porque eu fico no sol o tempo inteiro. Até pelo reflexo do sol, às vezes eu tenho que me deslocar, pra vê os alunos bem...

Teacher B was also a student of the graduate program at UFSC, who graciously accepted me and the equipment in her classes. At that time she had been an English teacher for eight years, but she concentrated her studies in Literature. In her interviews she pointed out that she did not follow a methodology or a theory of language acquisition in her classes, only her own experience. The teacher complemented her classes with material from other sources, mainly listening material (songs, interviews) and some activities for oral practice.

During the course, students had a mid-term test which I created and applied during the time I was their teacher. Teacher B assigned some homework, but she was not very demanding. Their final exam had two parts: Part 1 included listening and reading

skills. Part 2 tested grammar and writing skills.

1.6. Data Collection

I began my work with Section A, only observing the classes and taking notes. In the third class I used the tape recorder to record students' production during pair work, but the apparatus was not well accepted in the group, as illustrated in the following complaint:

Extract 1.1.

S1. I can't. Because the record (SI hits the tape recorder). I'm not 'acustumated'.

S2. You can or you can't?

S1. I can't talk.

S2. You are afraid.

S1. Yes.

Thus, after two audio-recorded classes, I decided to abandon the tape recording and used only the video tape in both Sections A and B. I used a handycamera, which I placed on whichever desk I occupied in each class. It was impossible to have a view of the whole classroom, so during each class I focused on a group of students sitting on the opposite side of the circle. During pair or group work I tried to focus on the work of one pair or group, in order to obtain better sound quality. Although the students never directly complained about the camera, I noticed that they were aware that their performance was being recorded. They paid attention to which part of the class the camera was aimed at and checked whether the recording light was on or not.

In the field notes I reported on the general development of each class, making special notes on the language used by the participants (L1 or L2), the reaction of the students to the activities proposed by the teacher, and the learners' behavior while talking to each other. My notes also include my own reaction to the activities developed during the classes. My observation variously focused on one student, one pair, one group, or the whole group. The teachers were also a focus of my observation, and their behavior inspired a great amount of field notes.

In order to answer as objectively as possible the research questions concerned with the interaction promoted by different types of activities, I created a checklist (see appendix A) with a classification of various types of interaction, the frequency of some situations, and the level of interaction during different activities.

During the period of observation, I conducted and audio-recorded two interviews with each teacher. I also interviewed two students from Section A: RA and DA. RA was selected because he was the student who most frequently asked the teacher questions and made comments during the class; even though his fluency was not good, he was not afraid of speaking in the group. DA was selected because her proficiency in English was excellent, although she would never spontaneously speak in class. During the oral test I had the chance to ask each student questions about their own performance in the course.

In Section B six students were interviewed. Only one of them

was selected because of his participation in class: LE. Three students were selected because they were always present in class and had a proficiency level above the average of the group. The other two students were selected at random. Section B, as reported by the students, did not have any outstanding students. All these interviews are used in my analysis.

In Section A, I observed 12 classes of 90 minutes, for a total of 18 hours of observation. My observation of Section B was shorter, because the semester was shorter and the teacher was absent for a period. Altogether I observed the section during eight classes, or 12 hours.

For a better comprehension of classroom interaction, in Chapter 2 the Interaction Hypothesis for language acquisition is presented and the difference between social interaction and negotiation of meaning is discussed.

CHAPTER 2

CLASSROOM INTERACTION

2.1. Defining Interaction

Interaction is a term of frequent use nowadays in the field of second language classroom research. Chaudron (1988:106) defines two different senses for interaction. Social interaction, henceforth SI, refers to the moments when participants engage in a conversation for the mere exchange of information. The term interaction is also a synonym for negotiation of meaning, henceforth NM which refers to the moments when interlocutors are interacting to clarify meaning. The term NM is used in studies that have been developed in the field of second language acquisition by Long (1980,1983) Long & Porter (1985), Pica (1987, 1988), Swain (1985) and Varonis & Gass (1985), with the aim of defining how NM between two interlocutors will interfere in the process of second language acquisition.

In a review of classroom studies of second language acquisition, Chaudron (1988:106) defines the procedures used in the research of second language acquisition through NM. These studies are carried out through analysis of the discourse produced by two interlocutors. The researchers look for speech acts that are connected with previous utterances and in which interlocutors try to negotiate meaning by clarifying, modifying, repeating, asking for clarification, and so on. Learners are not just communicating, they are trying to improve the quality of the input they receive and the quality of the output they produce.

Some of these studies will be reviewed later in this chapter.

In this study I will consider both definitions of interaction: social interaction and negotiation of meaning. In my analysis of the effect of task type on interaction, I will identify moments when NM takes place between learners in an attempt to communicate in the foreign language. The assumption here is that foreign language is acquired in the classroom through the NM of the participants. However, I also believe that the SI of the group interferes in the discourse produced by the interlocutors of the class. Thus, in the analysis of task type and language choice (L1 vs. L2), the role of the SI of the groups and the kind of social structure it shows, will be studied.

2.2. Interaction as a Theory of Language Acquisition

Classroom language learning has been studied within the scope of a number of theories. Ellis (1990:93) points out that "there is no consensus among applied linguists as to which theory most adequately explains classroom language learning", but my classroom experience has led me to believe in the value of interaction in the process of language acquisition. For this reason, in this research I will investigate the language classroom in the context of the Interaction Hypothesis (Ellis, 1990:107). The Interaction Hypothesis stresses the importance of "learners' comprehension and production as essential to their internalization of L2 rules and structures" (Pica et al 1991:344). Negotiation of meaning in the language classroom gives learners opportunities to comprehend and produce the foreign

language.

The importance of comprehensible input was introduced by Krashen in the Input Hypothesis

> We acquire by understanding language that contains structure a bit beyond our current level of competence (i+1). This is done with the help of context or extra-linguistic information. (Krashen 1982:21).

He claims that the foreign language data should be understandable but with effort. The theory is supported by Long in studies in which learners tried to negotiate the input received from their interlocutors in order to make it comprehensible. The input becomes comprehensible because some negotiation occured. He argues that:

> If it could be shown that the linguistic/ conversational adjustments [made by learners while talking] promote comprehension of input, and also that comprehensible input promotes acquisition, then it could be safely deduced that the adjustments promote acquisition (Long 1983:189).

It could also be argued that acquisition does not come directly from the exposure to what Long calls 'slightly advanced data', but from the effort made by learners to understand it. Although the comprehension of input is important to the acquisition process, it is not sufficient to learn a second language.

Swain's Output Hypothesis for language acquisition has been reviewed by Long and Porter (1985:215), Pica (1987:48), Pica,

Holliday, Lewis and Morgenthaler (1989:64), Pica, Holliday, Lewis, Berducci and Newman (1991:345), and Ellis (1992:2). The Output Hypothesis (Swain 1985; Cumming & Swain, 1986) suggests that it is possible for learners to understand the meaning of an utterance without reliance on recognition of its morphology or syntax, but that acquisition of higher levels of grammatical, discourse and sociolinguistic competence is dependent on opportunities for 'pushed output', i.e., production that is characterized by precision, coherence, and appropriateness (Swain, 1985:252). Learners need occasions to organize their output synthetically if they are to learn L2 morphosyntax. Swain's position is based on her research with learners who received a great amount of input in their course, but little face-to-face interaction with their colleagues. She believes that learners need chances to make themselves understood, to produce 'comprehensible output', so that they can test hypotheses about their interlanguage, practice new structures and forms, and use the new language creatively. Swain believes that acquisition of language comes especially from the moments during interaction when learners are "pushed to make their output comprehensible". These moments will happen when learners engage in NM with their peers. Nevertheless, she considers that the comprehensible output is, unfortunately, normally missing in typical classroom settings.

The combination of Krashen's Input Hypothesis with Swain's Output Hypothesis leads to the Interaction Hypothesis for second language acquisition. When learners take part in social

interaction in the classroom, there will be moments in which they have to negotiate the meaning of the input they receive and to produce utterances that are comprehensible. According to the Interaction Hypothesis, these are the moments in which the foreign language will be acquired. Pica et al. (1991:345) stress the significance of classroom interaction for acquisition:

> especially important are opportunities for learners to engage with their interlocutors in a negotiated exchange of message meaning. During negotiation, both learners and interlocutors can check the comprehensibility of what they themselves say. They can also request clarification, confirmation, or reiteration of what the other has said, and modify and adjust their speech toward greater clarity and comprehensibility. In this way, they can potentially reach mutual understanding through modifications of sounds, structures, and vocabulary in their responses to signals of difficulty.

Illustrations of Pica's point can be found in two examples of NM from the present study, produced during a writing activity. In Extract 2.1 the student repeats the teacher's previous utterance with a rising intonation (confirmation check). Through NM the learner improves on his production of the language until he reaches the level of output which satisfies both participants - teacher and learner.

Extract 2.1

S1. Teacher, esquecer is forgive?
(confirmation check)

T. Forget.

S1. Forgiving?
(confirmation check)

T. Forgetting.

S1. Forgetting?
(confirmation check)
T. Yeah.
(confirmation)

In Extract 2.2 both the student and the teacher make clarification requests, and the student rephrases the request, improving his output through NM.

Extract 2.2

T. You have to complete it with adjectives or a noun.

SI. Colors are adjectives?
(clarification request)

T. Ah?
(clarification request)

S1. Is a color an adjective?
(modification)

T. Colors are considered adjectives.
(confirmation)

It is interesting to notice that both examples end with a confirmation from the teacher.

2.3. Previous Studies on Interaction as Negotiation of Meaning

Several classroom research projects have been based on the Interaction Hypothesis and have studied the influence of different aspects of discourse in NM. The studies reviewed below involved both native speaker/non-native speaker (NS-NNS) interaction and non-native speaker/non-native speaker (NNS-NNS) interaction.

Long (1983:126) explains how input becomes comprehensible to the learner. He tries to identify the 'modifications of the interactional structure of conversation' that interlocutors use

to make input comprehensible. The modifications are classified into three types: strategies which serve to avoid conversational trouble; tactics which are used to repair the discourse when trouble occurs; and strategies and tactics which serve both functions.

Varonis and Gass (1985:71) investigate the interaction between NNS They recorded conversations of NNS-NNS dyads of different mother tongues and different proficiency levels. In their analysis they search for moments of 'non-understanding routines'(1985:73), those moments in which there is some overt indication that understanding between participants has not been completed. From the data analysis they propose a model to deal with the complexity of NM.

The results show that the greater the degree of difference in the background of the participants (mother tongue, proficiency), the greater the amount of negotiation in the conversation between two NNSs. The researchers also conclude that NNS-NNS discourse allows more opportunity for NM than NS-NNS or NS-NS discourse. When NNSs talk to each other, they feel more comfortable about indicating a non-understanding, because they recognize their 'shared incompetence' (1985:84), since both have the same status of NNS. The authors also point out some other aspects of the negotiation process. One is that the more involved and attentive participants are in the discourse, the more time they will spend negotiating meaning. Another involves the control of information - interlocutors seeking some particular information are more likely to initiate negotiation than interlocutors holding the

information.

Pica, Young and Doughty (1987) compare input comprehension in two different kinds of linguistic environment. The first kind was characterized by input that had been simplified for the learners. The second kind of environment gave opportunities for learners to interact with their interlocutors (native speakers) to arrive at mutual understanding. It was found that NNSs had a better comprehension when the content of directions was repeated and rephrased during interaction, while the premodified input was not an important factor in NNSs' comprehension. Interaction had a facilitating effect on comprehension, mainly through interactional modifications in the form of confirmations, comprehension checks, and clarification requests, which brought about the repetitions necessary for comprehension.

In another study on interaction, Pica (1988) examined how non-native speakers (NNSs) make their interlanguage utterances comprehensible when the native speaker (NS) shows difficulty in understanding them. Pica wanted to isolate and describe NNS output as input to the NS during negotiated interaction. The results revealed that the NNSs modified their interlanguage in response to the NS's requests for comprehensible input. However, the NS was a language teacher, and when asking for clarification from the NNSs, the NS also modified versions of NNS interlanguage utterances for them. Thus, the modifications by the NNs were infrequent and unnecessary.

Pica et al. (1989) identify and describe the comprehensible output produced by non-native speakers of English during oral

communication tasks. They claim that comprehension of second language input and production of comprehensible output are requirements for learners and their interlocutors as they negotiate the meaning of their messages to each other. The term negotiation is used to define the changes in the output of learners and their interlocutors as they try to resolve communication breakdowns and to work toward mutual comprehension.

Pica et al. (1991) analyze the relation between gender and interaction when learners have to perform communicative tasks with their interlocutors (native speakers). The results showed few differences in the quantity of negotiation among the dyads. However, they did find that when a female learner talked to a male native speaker there was less negotiation. Also, male native speakers were more likely to discontinue a negotiation when the non-native sought for clarification. The authors also consider the different cultural backgrounds of the interlocutors an important aspect for interaction.

The importance of interaction for language acquisition has been argued by other authors besides the ones concerned with NM. In an article about the importance of oral practice for the acquisition of a foreign language, Hall (1993:148) states that language acquisition is bound to the notion of oral practice and proposes that "the ability to participate as a competent member in the practices of a group is learned through repeated engagement in and experience with these activities with more competent members of a group". He relies on Vygotsky (1978), who related the development of individual cognition to one's

participation in social activities, because through this participation the person acquires not only the appropriate activity-related behavior, but also the steps necessary to accomplish it.

Aston (1986:128) presents a different approach to the concept of NM. He argues that a high frequency of NM does not mean a better input for the learner because there is a risk of pidgenization, as learners will acquire inaccurate forms from each other's interlanguage, and because frequent NM may interfere in SI. He believes that the three strategies suggested by Fillmore (Fillmore 1979:209 cited in Aston 1986:131) should be adopted outside the classroom:

1. Join a group and act as if you understand what's going on, even if you don't.
2. Give the impression - with a few well-chosen words -that you can speak the language.
3. Count on your friends for help.

Fillmore suggests that the learner should avoid negotiation by pretending that input is comprehensible, and by selecting utterances that can be easily understood. These strategies may not be successful in the foreign language classroom context where learners do not receive the same amount of input outside the class and can count on the teacher to clarify their doubts. Aston claims that some utterances may be classified simply as 'conversational continuants' because they do not involve non-understanding of linguistic features, but are used just to keep the conversation going.

Aston points out that not all non-understanding routines are

signaled by the interlocutors, many of them prefer to feign understanding than stop the flow of the conversation. Moreover, participants may just give up trying to understand their interlocutors and change the topic. After these considerations, Aston questions whether anything is actually achieved by a NM routine or whether the participants are just performing a ritual of understanding and agreement.

In the beginning of this chapter, I defined social interaction and negotiation of meaning. After that, the Interaction Hypothesis for language acquisition was presented with a review of some studies carried out in the field of negotiation of meaning. In the next chapter, the relation between task type and negotiation of meaning will be analyzed in part of the corpus of this study.

CHAPTER 3

ACTIVITIES AND INTERACTION

3.1. Previous Studies

In the eighties Pica and Doughty carried out a series of studies to determine the effect of task type and participation pattern on language classroom interaction. I review here three of these studies.

Pica and Doughty (1985) sought to establish whether group-work in the second language classroom results in more negotiation of meaning (NM) than teacher centered lessons. The results showed that group work provided learners with more opportunities to practice using the target language and to engage in direct interaction or NM. However, there was little motivation for classroom participants to obtain each other's views.

In another study (1986), the same authors examined the effect of task type on the amount of interactional adjustment that takes place in the classroom. Pica and Doughty concluded that a task with a requirement for information exchange is crucial to the generation of modificational interaction in the classroom. In a similar study, Pica (1987:18) claims that if the classroom is to assist the learners' language development, then they need activities "whose outcome depends on information exchange and which emphasize collaboration and an equal share of responsibility among classroom participants". In this way, the focus of the activity is on the process - how learners can acquire rules for communicating.

My study follows the same theoretical framework as the studies above, i. e., negotiations of meaning, such as confirmation and comprehension checks and clarification requests are considered to be important for comprehension and production of a second language. Those studies and mine also share a concern for the relation between task type and instances of NM. My study differs from those above, however, in that it is an ethnographic study, where I did not interfere in the activities planned by the teachers or in the way they were carried out during the lesson. Rather, I analyze instances of NM that occurred naturally in the classroom.

3.2. Frequency of Tasks

In order to analyze the activities that promote negotiation of meaning in the classroom, four lessons of each section were selected at random to be studied. First, all the activities of each lesson were described and parts of the discourse were transcribed. The illustrative extracts that appear throughout the analysis were taken from this transcription. Second, the activities were divided into tasks, since one activity can have several different tasks. For example, on May 26th Section A performed an activity which involved these tasks: reading a text, answering some comprehension questions, checking the answers with a classmate, and reporting a conclusion to the whole group. Each class was then divided according to the tasks carried out, so the task became my unit of analysis.

These tasks, with their frequency of occurrence during the

four lessons, are listed in Table 3.1 Frequency of Tasks, classified according to the following parameters:

1. WHOLE CLASS is the traditional teacher - centered class.
2. INDIVIDUAL is when students have to perform a task alone; students work on their own at their own pace.
3. PAIR WORK is when students do a task with one classmate.
4. GROUP WORK is when students perform a task in groups of three or more students.

Table 3.1 FREQUENCY OF TASKS

Group Distribution	GROUP A	GROUP B
WHOLE CLASS		
Accountability	6	4
Accuracy task	2	1
Checking oral comprehension	–	3
Checking reading comprehension	1	2
Fluency task	2	–
Grammar/Function explanation	6	2
Informal chat	4	2
Listening	–	6
Presentation of task	7	8
Warming up for writing	1	–
INDIVIDUAL		
Copying	6	1
Reading	2	5
Writing	7	2
PAIR WORK		
Accuracy	6	3
Fluency	5	3
GROUP WORK		
Accuracy	–	1
Fluency	1	1

The four categories accountability, presentation of the new task, copying, and checking listening comprehension were not on the original checklist, but were added when it became clear that these tasks did not fit into any of the original task categories. The most frequent task carried out in both sections was the presentation of the next task by the teacher. This refers to the instants when the teacher explains the steps of the next activity that will be carried out in class, and may include elucidation of new vocabulary, presentation of a new task, as well as class management, such as forming the pairs or groups. This was considered a type of task because of the moments of NM that it provides, since the students have to understand what they will do in order to perform the tasks.

In Section A the second most frequent task was writing. The quantity of writing tasks reflects one of Teacher A's goals. She commented in the interview (May 25th) that an English class does not consist only of interaction, but that there are moments when learners have to concentrate so that they will build up linguistic maturity.

Continuing the analysis of the frequency of tasks in Section A, I found equal numbers of the following tasks: accountability, grammar/function explanation, copying, and accuracy tasks in pairs. Each of these tasks occurred six times during the four classes, showing a balance in the teacher's planning among whole class, individual and pair work tasks. Segment 3.3, dealing with the analysis of the level of negotiation of meaning during each task, includes a more detailed

explanation of how these tasks were conducted during the lessons.

In Section B, the percentage of activities with the whole class was higher than in Section A, 63% compared to 50% in Section A. It indicates that the lessons were more centered on the teacher. The great number of listening tasks is in agreement with what Teacher B said in her interview (December 20th), that one of her main goals in the course was to develop listening ability. The effect could be seen in the report of two of the students, who said that oral comprehension was the ability they had most developed during the course.

None of the six listening tasks of Section B were preceded by a warm up and only three of them were followed by an oral comprehension task. Listening tasks included listening to songs with the lyrics (not singing) and listening to a long interview. The aim of this kind of task was apparently to provide input; students did not produce orally. Thus, when they had to produce oral English in class they had difficulties.

The lack of whole class accuracy and fluency tasks, only one each in four classes, was reflected in the level of oral production of the group. Pica (1987:4) states that

> the learning environment must include opportunities for learners to engage in meaningful interaction with users of the second language if they are to discover the linguistic and sociolinguistic rules necessary for second-language comprehension and production.

The classroom environment of Section B, with its lack of whole class accuracy and fluency tasks did not provide the social interaction (SI) expected for a group at that level, thus

neglecting to contribute to this discovery process. The eight students interviewed reported that they did not have any other oral contact with the English language outside of the classroom, so Pica's linguistic/sociolinguistic discovery conditions were not met.

This lack of interaction opportunities may have been at least partially responsible for the oral production difficulties that I witnessed when I acted as their substitute teacher. As the group was not used to activities for promoting their speaking ability, they had difficulties in accomplishing the ones I organized. For example, one task consisted of some questions, written on the board, to trigger a whole class discussion. While I was presenting the task, I stated three times that students did not need to copy the questions from the board. In spite of these repeated instructions, during the time for their discussion I had to repeat explicitly two more times, "You don't need to copy. You should be speaking, not copying. Now it is time to talk." I believe students avoided talking because they were not used to producing orally, so copying all the questions from the board would delay the conversation.

Reading tasks were also frequent in Section B, where the readings from the text book were carried out during the class. Although there were five reading activities during the four lessons, there was no warm up for reading and only two occasions of checking reading comprehension .

3.3. Tasks and Level of Negotiation of Meaning

I want to restate that the term negotiation of meaning refers to moments when the participants orally try to understand a previous utterance, by clarifying, modifying, repeating, asking for clarification or improving the accuracy of their output.

The aim of this part of my research is to study the level of negotiation of meaning promoted by each task. The check list from my time in the research field – the classroom – was the instrument that I selected to help me investigate the number of NMs during each task. This was done by directly observing the behavior of the participants. I collected this information using a subjective rating scale with the checklist (see appendix A) to evaluate the level of NM among the participants during the lesson. For each lesson, I quantified the level of NM that I perceived during the tasks. The rating scale went from 1 (no NM) to 5 (good NM). If a task receives number 1 for NM, it means that during the time of that task no non-understanding was signaled by the participants. In case the participants stopped the flow of the class to clarify a non-understanding or to modify their utterances, the task was rated as 2, 3, 4, or 5, according to the relative frequency with which this occurred.

The analysis reflects only the NM of the groups or pairs I was focusing on during the time I filled out my check list. Although an ethnographic study should ideally cover the whole class (Erickson, 1982) I found it impossible to observe the whole class at the same time, mainly due to the pair and group work activities. I had to concentrate my observation on a group or a

pair in order to record them, as well as to take notes from my observation. I believe an ethnographer should not worry about collecting all the information produced in the classroom during observation time, rather he/she should go as deep as possible into the description and analysis of a selected number of participants.

During the analysis of the material I collected, in order to maintain consistency, I rearranged the items of my check list into the same four categories used for task frequency which are whole class, individual, pair work, and group work. As the tasks involving the whole class are sometimes linked with activities carried out individually, especially reading and writing, I will comment about them together to maintain the sequence in which they occurred in class.

To determine the level of NM during each task, I used the numbers collected in my check list, confronted them with the transcription of the video tapes and with the field notes. Table 3.2 A and B present the final numbers of the rating scale for each section, showing the level of NM during each task. When there are several numbers in one segment, it is because there were several tasks of this type that day. Tasks which were registered in the field notes, but whose NM was neither quantified in the check list nor registered by the camera, appear in Table 3.2 as a question mark (?).

SECTION A

Table 3.2A - LEVEL OF NEGOTIATION OF MEANING DURING TASKS IN SECTION A

TASK TYPE	May 24th	May 26th	June 7th	June 21st
WHOLE CLASS				
Accountability	1	3-3	5	3-4
Accuracy task	4		2	
Checking oral comprehension				
Checking reading comprehension				5
Fluency task	?		5	
Grammar/Function explanation	?-1-1		3-4	2
Informal chat	?-2	1		1
Listening				
Presentation of task	4-5	1		1-3-1-1
Warming-up for reading				5
INDIVIDUAL				
Copying	?-4-1-2			2-1
Reading	1			1
Writing	2-4	3	1-4-4	2
PAIR WORK				
Accuracy task	5-1-3		3-4	2
Fluency task	4	3		1-2-5
GROUP WORK				
Accuracy task				
Fluency task		4		

WHOLE CLASS AND INDIVIDUAL TASK

Accountability refers to the occasions when the teacher gathers the group's attention after a pair or group task and checks students' accomplishment of the task. During accountability the level of SI was usually good. The task was coordinated by the teacher, and the aim was always students' participation. As the class had a balanced proficiency level and the same first language, however, the instances of non-understanding were few. This is consistent with Varonis and Gass's claim (1985:84) that a

greater number of non-understandings occur when participants have different proficiency levels and first languages. However, NM can occur at a different level when there are no linguistic problems to cause non-understanding. This type of NM is classified by Aston (1986:128) as a 'conversational continuant'. An example of both NM and SI can be seen in Extract 3.1, in a moment of accountability that occurred after a pair work fluency task.

Extract 3.1

T. Osvaldo.

S1. I never worry about my health.

T. What do you mean by that?

S1. I never pay attention. I never go to the doctor. If it is cold .../

S2. He should worry about health.

The teacher's question "What do you mean by that?" is a clear instance of a request for clarification, not prompted by linguistic difficulties, with which S1 tries to comply. Because the teacher opened the ground for interaction, S2 feels comfortable to evaluate the content of S1's explanation, providing an example of SI.

Grammar/function explanation is characterized by the teacher explaining either a grammatical or a functional aspect of the language to the students. The level of NM during grammar/function explanation varied, in my opinion, due to the different times when it occurred in class. For example, when a grammar explanation was the first activity of the class (May 24th), the students did not interact with the teacher. On the

other hand, when it was preceded by an activity that made the students exercise their oral fluency, they did interact and negotiate meaning with the teacher (June 7th), probably because they were orally more warmed up.

When I started watching the video tapes for the analysis, I questioned the value of the grammar explanations. For example, on June 7th the class was about the future tense, more specifically the difference between the use of will and going to. Some students dared to express their uncertainty to the class:

Extract 3.2

S1. Teacher, I don't understand the difference. If I say 'I will finish at six o'clock', it is a future arrangement. It is predetermined.

However, most of the others seemed not to understand either, but did not say anything. When Teacher A watched this part of the tape, she confirmed my supposition about the usefulness of grammar explanations: "Eles não estão entendendo nada. Eu posso ver agora pela reação deles que eles estavam sem entender". During the grammar explanation she even asked them many times:" Do you see the difference?" or " Can you see the difference?". But no student said "no" or "yes". The group was quiet and tried to understand, but such a focus on grammar was too far from the communicative classes this group was used to.

The grammar explanation cited above was followed by a grammar exercise about the future tense that I classified as an accuracy task. The NM was not high because it was a closed exercise in which students had to complete blanks with the correct verb

tense. Students were so apathetic that they did not participate spontaneously when the teacher was correcting the task. Teacher A changed her approach and turned the accuracy task into a fluency task by asking the students "What are your plans for the future?" and later on "What will your life be (like) in 3, 5, 15, and 30 years from now?". The new task shifted the focus from form to meaning. Thus, the task promoted good SI as well as instances of NM. The interest in accuracy occurred naturally, as can be seen in extract 3.3:

Extract 3.3

S1. I'm not sure about a sentence.

T. Say it.

S1. Thirty years from now I'll be retired from TELESC.

T. OK.

SI. Is the 'from' correct?

T. Yeah.

Although the grammar point the teacher was focusing on was the future tense, the student's doubt was about the use of the preposition 'from'. Indicating that in spite of the doubt expressed by the class earlier, the student felt confident about the use of the future tense in this context.

Some questions made by the students during the activity, for example, "Can I say 'Tomorrow night I am home.'?" and " I'm sure about 'I'm going to come back home' but not sure 'I'm coming back home tomorrow'. Is it right?", provide some evidences that the students were trying to align the information about the future tense with their existing hypotheses about language. These

grammar questions are also instances of NM.

Even though the students were able to attain good results during this exercise, I believe that the teacher's explanation only raised their consciousness of the grammar point, which does not mean that the students have acquired competence in using it. The teacher, aware of this, commented in class, "It's going to take you a long time to internalize that." She also warned them about the contrast with L1: "In Portuguese we don't have this difference. In English you have different ways to express the future." In my opinion, the long grammar explanation, plus the exercises presented by the teacher, will make students think before using the future tense. This is in accordance with one of the teacher's objectives in the course, which was to provide students with activities to raise their linguistic consciousness. The act of thinking about the language may raise some doubts, and consequently stimulated some instances of linguistic NM. It is essential for the teacher to provide the opportunity for these doubts to show up during the class.

Only one complete reading activity was carried out during the four classes analyzed in this chapter. It began with a warm up for reading which promoted a good NM. This occurred because Teacher A was wrong in her interpretation of the characters of the textbook, so the students had to convince her of her mistake, which reversed the standard roles of teacher and student participation in class.

Extract 3.4

T. They are close friends now. Richard and Sandy. Yeah? They are always together, remember? Last unit they were together, in Unit Four.

S1. She is Richard's sister.

T. No.

Ss. Yes.

T. Sandy?

Ss. [incomprehensible].

T. Richard's sister?

S2. Sure.

T. How do you know that?

S3. Here, the family.

T. And who is the girl who ...

S3. Gill.

T. Oh Yeah! You see, class. You have bad ideas. You cannot see a man and a woman together and you think they are having an affair. They are brother and sister. OK. And what are the changes?

S4. You are too romancist.

T. Romancist? Romantic.

S4. Romantic.

T. Romantic. Yeah.

The teacher was leading the class to conclude that Richard and Sandy were about to have an affair, but she was wrong and the students had the opportunity to correct her, and S4 even

concluded that the teacher was very romantic. So, teachers should not worry about committing some mistakes once in a while, since something positive can come from that.

Reading was usually done individually, and thus participants did not interact during that time. Some moments of NM occurred, however, while the teacher was checking the reading comprehension. The NM during that task was related mainly to the explanation of new vocabulary which the teacher decided to clarify. Teacher A used very interesting and diversified ways to negotiate the meaning of new vocabulary, for example:

> -"I would argue" means "I would discuss at a meeting".
> -"The union" is like CUT, CGT, a workers' class.
> -"The staff" means the workers in a company, here "staff" means the managers of the company.
> -"Mean", in this case, means a person who doesn't want to spend money, who is not generous. It is the opposite of generous.
> -"Heating" is an apparatus to keep a place warm.

I cannot say whether Teacher A had always prepared this part of her classes, but I want to say here that I was impressed with her ability to give meaning to words. She used a diversity of strategies such as definition, comparison, synonyms, antonyms, examples, or the word used in a sentence. However, only the explanation of 'mean' was provoked by a clarification request from a student - "What's mean ?"; all the other ones came from her own initiative. This is in accordance with Pica et al (1987:753), who concluded that teachers may "assist understanding of input through adjustments in quantity and redundancy of teacher talk, made without requests for clarification or

confirmation from their students". They point out, however, that this redundancy is not sufficient to guarantee comprehension.

The most frequent task - presentation of next task - did not stimulate much interaction in the class, as most of the time the teacher spoke alone with no intervention from the students. This reflects the unequal distribution of participation between teacher and students that is common in the classroom. However, when the next task was a writing task (e. g., May 24th), students negotiated meaning with the teacher to clarify the aims of the task. This is an indication of the greater concern students have for accuracy when the task involves writing. This will be discussed in more detail in presentation of next task for Section B.

On May 24th, the pre-writing task consisted of students saying what they thought were good qualities in people. Adjectives were written on the board, and each student said which adjectives applied to him/her. At that moment some students started to question their classmates' view of themselves, so their first interest - the writing task - was replaced by a personal interest that promoted a good social interaction, with some instances of conversational continuants (Aston 1986).

Writing itself promoted different levels of NM, varying from 1 to 4. All tasks were individual, and the NM arose from doubts about spelling, about how to accomplish the task, about vocabulary to express their ideas, and about the aim of the task. In extract 3.5 we can see a student questioning the teacher about how much sense (meaning) a poem should have. This was a

negotiation about the aim of the task, since during the presentation of the task the teacher had said that the students should write quickly and not worry about making sense:

Extract 3.5

S. Teacher. Is it necessary to give, to make sense?

T. No, no sense. It is a poem.

The student makes a confirmation request about previous instructions, and the teacher's answer clarifies that students should not be overly concerned with making sense.

During writing, students interacted at times with the teacher, but most of the time they preferred to confer with their classmates. Negotiation of meaning is favored, during this task, by the silence of the classroom. Students feel more confident to ask the teacher to come close to them and then to expose their doubts when the floor is free without having to interrupt the teacher.

It was interesting to observe that a very shy student preferred to look up words in the dictionary instead of interacting with the other participants. This was also an attempt to clarify possible doubts and to improve the quality of her output, but this fact was not computed as an instance of interaction.

On May 24th and 26th the informal chats were about the strike. The teacher and the students needed to strengthen their relationship because they wanted to have class during the strike. The SI was high because it was important to make clear that students' presence was essential for the class to happen, and to

arrange where and when the next class would be. Nevertheless, there were few moments of NM. Brown (1991:9) claims that during 'procedural' tasks, which involves getting things done, students use language and expressions with which they are already familiar with whereas in tasks in which students are forced into using new language and involved consciously in expressing it there is a greater chance for learning. During informal chat the language students used was already familiar to them; therefore, there was no 'linguistic challenge' to the students and they did not need to negotiate meaning because they could easily understand each other.

As would be expected, the level of interaction was usually low during copying. The moments of negotiation occurred when students asked the teacher about the use of expressions written on the board, because they could not understand them. On May 26th, RA, the most inquisitive student, questioned the teacher about the meaning of what she had written on the board and about the usefulness of copying something from the board that did not make sense to him. It was the preparation for a writing task. In my opinion, this is an example of NM since the student wanted to clarify what was written on the board and also the aim of the task.

PAIR WORK

Concerning pair work, one interesting characteristic of Teacher A was that she always organized the dyads in which students would work. When there was a sequence of tasks in pairs, she sometimes

reorganized the class so that students would have a new partner for each task. At first, this seemed very time consuming with no apparent result. During the interview Teacher A commented: "Eu troco eles de lugar para eles se conhecerem. Já está no meio do semestre e eles não sabem o nome um do outro". After some time observing the group, I could perceive that Teacher A's attitude led the students to interact with all their classmates. As they had contact with more peers, they became familiar with the group and felt more confident to use the foreign language and to express themselves.

The pair work tasks were divided into accuracy tasks and fluency tasks because I wanted to identify which type of task would lead to more NM. The level of NM during pair work varied considerably in both types. The data indicate that the level of NM was more influenced by the proficiency level of the students I was focusing on each time than by the aim of the task - accuracy or fluency. Pairs formed with students of different levels usually produced more NM, because there were more non-understandings. But the frequent stops in the flow of the conversation disturbed communication and emphasized word-by-word understanding. This supports Aston's point of view (1986) that NM may disturb the flow of the conversation.

More proficient students tend to negotiate more with their interlocutors than the less proficient ones, who do not verbalize their non-understandings. After some time observing Brazilian learners of English, I have perceived that some kinesics may be interpreted as non-understanding in a conversation. Some

attitudes like nodding and/or agreeing constantly, repeating a word just said by the interlocutor, looking at the interlocutor's notebook, staring, and avoiding eye contact may demonstrate different levels of non-understanding that are not orally expressed, but that may break the flow of a conversation.

Extract 3.6 illustrates this kind of behavior during a fluency pair work task carried out by S1 (a male student) and S2 (a female student), right after a written task that was meant to provide the topic for their conversation.

Extract 3.6

S1. Ok. What did you do?

S2. Number one?

S1. Yes

S2. It is not good. (eyes on her notebook)

S1. Ok. Go.

S2. (silence)

S1. Did you write?

S2. (shows her notebook to her classmate)

S1. (Reads S2's written task silently, and comments)

S1. Good. Now I'm going to read (mine).

While S1 reads his sentences aloud, S2 smiles, but avoids eye contact with S1. She does not ask any question or make any comment. S2 may have been intimidated by the presence of the camera close to her, but in my opinion, she could not overcome her weak proficiency and adapt to the group. In the example above, she does not take risks or ask questions to make input comprehensible to her. In her questionnaire (Appendix B) she

comments "(As aulas) têm sido excelentes. Gosto de estar nas aulas, apesar de não estar acompanhando plenamente, por estar num nivel abaixo, principalmente na conversação." Her difficulties, and her attitude during the classes may be related to the fact that she was one of the students who dropped out in the middle of the course.

The difference between male and female participants was not one of the aims of this study. Yet, the extract above supports some findings in the field (Gass & Varonis, 1985; Pica et al 1991) that suggest that women, at least in interactions with men, feel less confident in indicating a non-understanding.

GROUP WORK

Although the importance of group work has been stressed in recent years, only one activity in groups was carried out in the four classes studied. It was a fluency task.

Murphey (1990:4) describes two types of group or pair task, problem solving and debate, which are typified as convergent and divergent respectively. In problem solving, students try to resolve a problem collectively while in debate, each student takes an opposite position, and argues for their point of view. Murphey states that students negotiate more and have more quality interaction when the task is convergent, because they try to construct common meanings and understandings. During debate, on the other hand, students are not so concerned with negotiation as with negating each other and thus have fewer confirmation checks and clarification requests.

The activity Group Holiday, from the book Keep Talking (Klippel 1984), carried out by Section A (May 26th) was a typical debate task where students had to convince the other members of the group of their holiday choice. The teacher stimulated the debate by saying that students should not accept easily their classmates' opinion, that they had to argue. As a result, the most proficient member of each group led the discussion. Consistent with Murphey, students did not try to understand their classmates' point of view, but rather got stuck in their own. When time was up for the activity, the group had not decided where they would go together.

This task did not promote modifications during students' conversation because of this lack of interest in the other's point of view (Pica and Doughty 1985) and because the task did not compel students' equal participation. Pica (1986:321) found that the participation pattern facilitates the interaction only if the task requires an exchange of information. Unless a required information exchange task is chosen, students will interact less.

DISCUSSION

From the analysis of the tasks carried out in Section A the following conclusions can be drawn: (1) Except reading, all the activities promoted instances of NM. Since NM can only occur during oral production, the great quantity of communicative tasks carried out in this section promoted numerous instances of NM. Raising linguistic consciousness through grammar explanation and

grammar activities can trigger NM routines. (2) The classification used in this study does not show any tendency for one type of task to promote more NM than the others. The level of NM seemed to be more related to the moment in which the task was presented during the class, and to the teacher's encouragement to students to clarify their doubts or to continue their conversations. A divergent group activity, lacking information exchange, was inefficient in promoting NM. (3) The frequent change of pairs appeared to stimulate NM, breaking down inhibition, providing students with opportunities to work with classmates with more proficiency and less proficiency, and also because it helped to overcome the problem of working in a group with the same L1 and a common background. (4) Students' effort to use English in class led them to instances of NM. (5) A teacher's mistake or admission of doubt in class may promote instances for students to negotiate meaning with the teacher.

Concerning the social interaction of the group, it was observed that Teacher A carried out more communicative tasks which promoted more interaction and made the teacher-student relationship more symmetrical, in spite of the exclusive use of English. The teacher provided activities in which the students' participation was assured and in which the students could express their own ideas or talk about their own lives. Observing the students, they generally looked attentive and involved during most of the activities.

The teacher was happy with the relationship she had established with the group, with their performance, and with the

way they accepted her authority. She commented in the interview "essa turma é muito especial, eles fazem qualquer coisa, eles não ficam assim reclamando". The teacher had a strong control over students' activities in class, she was aware of everything that was happening in class, but, at the same time, she had a very kind attitude towards the students. In this way, she managed to achieve the goals she had in mind. Even though the students showed difficulties in using only English during the classes, they liked the way they interacted with the teacher, in my field notes there are comments such as "the class is noisy and happy" and "everybody is talking and they look happy".

In Section A students felt comfortable to ask the teacher questions, on June 7th for example, there were many instances of students' initiation in the conversation, which reverses the patterns of teacher and students participation in class. Breaking the pattern of participation is important because the interaction is more similar to real conversation and allows students to negotiate meaning with the teacher.

SECTION B

Table 3.2B - LEVEL OF NEGOTIATION OF MEANING DURING TASKS IN SECTION B.

TASK TYPE	Oct 6th	Nov 8th	Nov 29th	Dec 1st
WHOLE CLASS				
Accountability	?	5	3	5
Accuracy task				5
Checking oral comprehension	3	3	1	
Checking reading comprehension	1	4		
Fluency task				
Grammar/Function explanation	4		1	
Informal chat		?		?
Listening	1-1	1	1-1	1
Presentation of task	1	?-1	1-2-3	4-1
Warming-up for reading	1			
INDIVIDUAL				
Copying	1			
Reading	3-1	1	1-2	
Writing			2	4
PAIR WORK				
Accuracy task	3		3-4	
Fluency task	3	5		3
GROUP WORK				
Accuracy task			2	
Fluency task		3		

WHOLE CLASS AND INDIVIDUAL TASKS

The instances of accountability promoted a good level of NM in Section B. It was particularly good on November 8th, when students had to retell a story they had heard to the teacher. In order to push them to speak, the teacher checked and confirmed while students argued and justified. The only problem was that the teacher centered the activity on two students, impairing the participation of the rest of the class.

Swain (1986:132) explains why NM is part of second language acquisition:

> ... the meaning of 'negotiating meaning' needs to be extended beyond the usual sense of simply 'getting one's message across'. Simply getting one's message across can and does occur with grammatically deviant forms and sociolinguistically inappropriate language. Negotiating meaning needs to incorporate the notion of being pushed towards the delivery of a message that is not only conveyed, but that is conveyed precisely, coherently and appropriately.

The following example of negotiation during accountability comes from the November 29th class, when the teacher pushes the student to a more accurate form to express his ideas:

Extract 3.7

S1. ... in a big city, they are more unhappy than after.

T. OK. They are unhappier than after.

S1. More happier?

T. No. Unhappier.

S1. OK. Unhappier than after.

T. Unhappier than before.

S1. OK. Before.

Although the teacher might have understood what the student meant in the first utterance, she attempted to construct with him the correct form of the sentence.

During listening students did not have to produce any output, but just had to listen to the oral text or song from the tape recorder; thus, the level of NM was low. In order to check oral comprehension, the teacher asked students to repeat sentences / utterances after the tape recorder so that she could

check their word-by-word understanding; on one occasion the teacher gave the students a copy of the oral text so that they could follow the oral text and answer some questions about it at home. There was not a concern for the comprehension of the main idea of the oral text. None of the listening tasks were preceded by a warm up for listening. The lack of an aim for listening appeared to have left the students unmotivated. I observed that during the listening tasks some students talked to each other or read something else. On October 6th, the last task of the class was listening to a song without any other task involved, so some students decided to leave during the activity.

Writing in Section B was a time when the teacher's help was required, promoting a NM level 2 - 4. The level varied depending on the level of difficulty of the task. On November 29th the task consisted of answering a personality quiz, an easy task that promoted few instances of NM. In contrast, on December 1st, students had to write a paragraph about what they would do if they had a year off. The teacher called their attention to the accuracy in the use of if sentences. The students checked with their classmates, the teacher, and me, resulting in a good level of NM. Extract 3.8 gives an example of my participation in the group and my effort to build a student's confidence in his interlanguage.

Extract 3.8

SI. Silvia. Frase?

Me. Sentence.

S1. I think it is not a good sentence. You see?

Me. (Reading) If I had a year off I would ...

S1. Eu não posso começar a frase assim. Não tá certo. Em português não posso dizer isso.

Me. Yes, but in English you can. No problem.

Reading, a common task in Section B, was done five times in the four classes I focus on in this chapter. The level of NM was usually low, with the exception of one occasion, when reading was preceded by a warm up. On this occasion, the level of NM reached 3, indicating that the warm up can motivate the students to understand the text and consequently to ask the teacher's help for meaning.

On November 29th there were two reading tasks. First, students read silently the text Benfield's Million, which did not prompt any NM. Second, some students, chosen at random, read aloud a list of functions that they were to use to discuss the first text. The second reading promoted an instance of NM when a student who had the chance to read asked the teacher the meaning of the sentence she had read:

Extract 3.9

S1. (Reading) That's non sense!

T. Any problem here?

S1. Nonsense?

T. Absurdo. OK? Absurdo.

Teacher B misses the opportunity to negotiate the meaning of the word 'nonsense' with her students. The use of Portuguese (L1) during the classes is analyzed in detail in Chapter 4 of this study.

During presentation of new task, Teacher A sometimes read the instructions of an activity from the text book (NM level 1), or she quickly explained a new activity to be carried out by the students. On December 1st, presentation of a new task prompted a higher level of NM than on any of the other days. The next task would be a writing task and the teacher was very concerned about the use of if sentence structure. The structure raised the same concern in the students, who asked some questions to clarify the meaning of words in the task instructions and the aim of the task itself.

Swain (1986:134) concludes in her study that students perform better in written tasks than with oral language because they are more stimulated by the teacher to be accurate during written tasks. In the same way, the students of Sections A and B showed more concern for written tasks and negotiated more during the presentation of a new written task so that they could be more accurate during writing.

PAIR WORK

As Teacher B did not interfere in dyad formation, students tended to always work with the same classmates. During the interview, one student could remember the name of only two classmates, the ones he always worked with.

Two weeks before the end of the course, the teacher changed some students' places. As she commented in the interview, which took place about that time, "Eu acho que já devia ter feito isso desde o começo ... eles também não conheciam quase ninguém ou

conheciam só o colega do lado. Então pra não intimidá-los eu não mudei eles de lugar." Changing students' places since the beginning of the semester could have helped them get to know each other and promote better interaction. One student commented about changing places: "Há uma tendência dos alunos sentarem nos mesmos lugares, porque a gente quer sentar do lado de quem a gente tem afinidade. Nesse grupo todos tem o mesmo nível, ninguém é muito bom ... eu só vi (isso) quando falei com mais gente." She meant that for her it had been a surprise to see that the whole class had the same proficiency level as she did, but she only discovered that when the teacher changed pairs and made them build affinity with other classmates.

In both sections, A and B, pair work tasks were sometimes preceded by a writing task whose aim was to provide material for the oral part of the activity. Unfortunately, it resulted in students reading each others' notebooks instead of trying to negotiate meaning through oral utterances. Teacher B perceived this problem and warned the students: "You don't have to copy from your friend's book, you have to listen and then write."

The activities in dyads promoted the best performance in terms of NM compared to whole class, individual or group work, regardless of whether they were fluency or accuracy tasks. However, because students were not used to speaking, even in pair work they had a tendency to agree with their classmates, instead of showing a non-understanding. Instances of (NM) can be initiated by simply "Sorry?" or "What?" (Nov 29th), which would lead the interlocutor to reformulate his previous utterance.

On October 6th the dyads had to answer some questions about a previous reading. Although the level of NM was average, the lack of an accountability task to check their performance made the pair work task weak and useless as a pre-task for the whole class interaction. As they did not present to the teacher or to the whole class, they did not receive feedback about the accuracy of their utterances.

The task that encouraged the best NM consisted of two parts (Nov 8th). First, one member of the dyad read a story; after that, he/she had to tell his/her classmate the story. This problem solving task, in which students try to resolve a problem, supports Murphey's claim mentioned in the discussion of Section A (1990:4) that students negotiate more and have more quality interaction when the task is convergent, when all the students have the same goal, because they try to construct common meanings and understandings; thus they have more confirmation checks and clarification requests.

GROUP WORK

In the group work task whose goal was fluency (Nov 8th), the teacher gave the students eight pictures, which they had to put in order to write a story. In the group I focused on, students got so involved with the task that they used only (Portuguese, although the teacher and I called their attention to this five times. English was not used for real communication during this task.

Varonis and Gass (1985:84) found that the highest incidence

of NM occurs in dyads that have the most different background, in other words, those that share neither a language nor a proficiency background. The participants of Section B made use of their common L1 to solve the task presented by the teacher, missing the opportunity to improve their oral proficiency through NM while using L2. The use of L1 will be analyzed again in Chapter 4 of this study.

On November 29th the group work consisted of a discussion where students were to use the if sentence structure to express their decisions about the future of a small city in England. I had the opportunity to observe two groups at work. In one group students were more involved in the task and tried to convince their classmates of their ideas. Apparently the members of this group had more linguistic competence to carry out the task. In the other group students were very quiet; they reread the text book, but did not get involved with the task, which was very removed from their reality. Although both groups needed help to express themselves because they lacked vocabulary and information about the city, they did not call the teacher, who was walking around the classroom without interfering in the group work. From my point of view, this task did not promote the SI expected from group work because it did not involve information exchange, only opinion exchange, and Brazilian students cannot be expected to have opinions about cities in the interior of England.

In the November 8th field notes, there is a reference to an informal talk with Teacher B in which she complained about her relationship with the group and I suggested rearranging the

students in the classroom so that it would break the routine of the classes. In my opinion, it was interfering in the interaction of the group because they were too familiar with their partners, which led them to accept imperfect output from them.

DISCUSSION

The investigation of the level of NM promoted by different tasks in Section B has led to the following conclusions: (1) In order to have instances of NM it is important for the task to involve oral production. During listening and reading the scores of NM were null. The lack of warm-ups and goals for listening and reading tasks did not motivate students to pay attention and understand the oral text; the reading task which was preceded by a warm up promoted more NM. Warm-ups and comprehension checks of oral/written text are oral tasks related to listening and reading, but computed separately, so during these tasks NM can occur. (2) The fact that Portuguese was allowed in class and that students commonly worked with the same classmates decreased the need to negotiate meaning and deprived the students of the opportunity to get to know the group. (3) The level of difficulty of the task was an important determinant of the level of NM. The more difficult the task, the more it requires from the students, who negotiate meaning in order to achieve better production. (4) Pair work tasks, regardless of whether they were for fluency or accuracy, promoted more instances of NM. The highest incidence of NM occurred during a convergent task in which students had to exchange information in order to reach a common goal. (5)

Accountability also promoted good NM because students had previously used the necessary language and because this was the moment when they received feedback from the teacher about their performance. Thus, teachers should involve as many students as possible in this activity in order to give them all maximum opportunities for NM. (6)) Using a writing task to prepare students for a speaking task may not be successful, since students sometimes read their classmates' notebooks instead of trying to understand each other orally.

Oral production, especially naturally occurring oral production, is essential for interaction. Teacher B, however, carried out few of the activities proposed by the book in a way that promoted oral production, and of these, several were drills. As a result, the interaction was lower and the oral production of the students did not improve much during the course.

Some aspects of Teacher B' classroom management interfered in the social interaction of the group. For example, the students often interacted with the same classmates because the teacher did not frequently assign the pairs.

The students' opinions show that the teacher-student interaction in Section B was good and some of them demonstrated some affection for her. One student, however, complained that Teacher B restricted her classes to following the book which made the classes boring. However, Teacher B did not have the same point of view about the teacher-student interaction, as she commented in the interview:

> Essa turma do nível 5 que eu tive, foi uma turma que eu não consegui me encontrar dentro da turma, e acho que a turma não se encontrou comigo, sabe?. Também pelo problema que eu tive que sair, fiquei durante aquele tempo fora, eu não consegui encontrar o objetivo da turma.

In the same interview, Teacher B explained that in her classes she tries to identify the objective of the group and based on this objective she plans her classes. The lack of a good interaction with the group hindered Teacher B to identify the objective of the group, and later in the interview she shows her feelings about that:

> ... a turma pra mim foi bastante problemática, e olha que eu já tenho bastante experiência, mas essa turma foi uma das piores que eu já tive, como eu tô falando, eu acho que muita culpa, ehhh, tem, foi, foi, foi por causa, foi minha.

She expresses frustration at not having managed to identify the objective of the class because of the lack of quality interaction, which is consistent with what I observed. She did not select tasks which involved her and the students in a good interaction. Nor was there evidence - from my observation or the interviews - that she promoted informal conversation with the students. She herself complained about her own lack of motivation because she had not been able to identify with the group.

The teacher's and the students' opinions about the student-student interaction are convergent, since they agree that the interaction among the students had many problems. Three reasons for this weak interaction were identified by Teacher B: first, the diversity of age and proficiency of the students, the size of the group (28 students), and her limited involvement with the

group. She could perceive that her attitude was reflected in the interaction of the students, who were very passive in the classroom: "Eles entre si também não tentam se conhecer melhor".

3.4. Conclusions

The following conclusions are supported by the data from both Section A and Section B: (1) it is necessary to have oral tasks in order to have instances of NM; (2) accountability is an important task because it is the moment when students' production is checked by the teacher; (3) the constant use of L2 and working with different classmates favor the occurrence of NM; (4) during pair/group work convergent tasks promote more NM than divergent tasks; (5) the sequence of tasks appears to be more relevant than the type of the task for determining the level of NM; (6) in spite of the activities, there are learners who do not verbalize a non-understanding; however, they can demonstrate their difficulties through kinesics, looking up words in a dictionary, or checking their books and notebooks.

CHAPTER 4

LANGUAGE CHOICE AND INTERACTION

4.1. Language Choice and Interaction

From the beginning of class observation of Section A, the use of L1 by the participants called my attention. The use of LI usually arose from a moment of non-understanding or during real communication, but instead of trying to understand each other through NM in L2, participants chose to use L1 to maintain the flow ot the conversation. Thus, the use of L1 characterized moments when participants avoided the effort of negotiating meaning. It was this observation that led me to include in this study the investigation of when the interaction of the group occurs in L1 and when it occurs in L2. In this chapter interaction is used to refer to moments of social interaction during the classes, and the analysis concentrates on the moments when there is a code switch.

Students studying English in Brazil usually have in common Portuguese as their first language (L1). This makes communication in the foreign language (FL) sound artificial, since it would naturally occur in Portuguese. Defining the rules of group interaction, Coulthard (1977:55) established that "all communities have an underlying set of non-linguistic rules which governs when, how and how often speech occurs". In the FL class these rules include when, how and how often the LI can be used in the classroom.

These rules are established by the teacher and, although

similar, they vary from one group to another. As the use of L2 does not occur spontaneously, it is the teacher's role to encourage students use L2 during the class. When does the interaction occur in English and when does it occur in Portuguese? What is the teachers' approach to the use of L1 and L2 in the classroom? What are the reasons for code switching? What functions does a code switch perform in the classroom? With these questions in mind, I analyzed the data.

4.2. Methodology

For the analysis of code switching, I selected the tapes and field notes of four classes for each section. Since the classes were held in English (L2) I identified all the times a participant switched to Portuguese (L1) and a few switches to L2. My analysis is limited to instances of code switching that were captured by the camera or registered in my field notes. Of great value to my analysis are the interviews carried out with teachers and students of the two sections studied.

4.3. Previous Studies

Atkinson (1987) defends the use of the mother tongue in the language classroom. He presents three reasons for permitting limited (L1) use in the classroom: (1) it is a learner-preferred strategy; (2) it allows students to say what they want (humanistic approach); and (3) it saves time for other activities. A series of activities and techniques that use L1 are presented as suggestions for a class of beginners or students at

the early levels. For more advanced students, however, Alkinson (op. cited 245) suggests activities to promote "circumlocution, paraphrase, explanation, and simplification": in other words, negotiation of meaning, because through this type of exercise students become "aware of how much they can do with the corpus of language they possess."

In a reply to Atkinson (1987), Harbord (1992:350) presents the results of a study conducted in English classes in Europe. First, he identified a variety of mother tongue functions being used during the classes. Second, these functions were classified on the basis of the teacher's objective in using L1: (1) facilitating teacher-student communication, (2) facilitating teacher-student relationships, and (3) facilitating learning of L2. Then, the author criticizes teachers for enabling L1 to perform so many functions in class. Based on principles of the task-based approach, he argues that:

> It is not so much what the teacher chooses to isolate and explain in the way of grammar that the student will pick up but the language the teacher uses in negotiating meaning with the students: giving instructions, checking meaning, and so on.

Harbord suggests that the mother tongue could be used, however, to provoke discussion and speculation, to develop clarity and flexibility of thinking, and to make students and teachers aware of the interaction between the mother tongue and the target language that occurs during language acquisition.

Coracini (1992) analyzes classes of French and English for specific purpose (reading). The aim of her study is to identify,

through discourse analysis, the teachers' ideologies that are revealed in the way they make use of LI and L2 in the classroom. The writer concludes that the choice of a code is made by the teacher, and students just follow the leader. She points out that the teacher is the one who has the knowledge (L2) and this gives him/her power and makes the teacher-student relationship asymmetrical. Thus, when the conversation is conducted in L1, the relationship is more symmetrical than when the code is switched to L2, because there is less difference in knowledge to interfere in the group interaction.

In her article about the use of L1 in the FL classroom, Spratt (1985) spots some possible causes for the use of L1 by students. She claims that the classroom climate nowadays 'invites' the use of L1 because ((1)) students may struggle to say or write things they do not know how to, (2) students are less controlled to use L2 due to the number of pair and group tasks with the teacher out of earshot; and ((3)) many times the teacher focuses on the language required for an activity, but not on the language for class management.

4.4. Analysis of the Data

The analysis of the data focuses on three areas: the teacher's role in the definition of the language used in the classroom; the students' behavior concerning the use of L1 and L2; and the functions performed by the instances of code switching present in the corpus. Code switching refers to the moments when a participant changes the linguistic code from L1 to L2 or from L2

to L1. Situations when just one word is switched, for example, "How can I say troco?", are also included in the analysis.

4.4.1. The Teacher's Role

Asymmetrical events are important sources of information about the relation between language and power. People select the way of speaking according to the social hierarchy of the interlocutor and the context (Magalhães 1991:211). The classroom is a social context where an asymmetrical event takes place. On one side is the teacher, who possesses the knowledge; on the other side are the students, who want to possess that knowledge. Asymmetrical events usually give to the most important participants the power to set the topic and to control turn taking.

In the classroom the rules of code switching between LI and L2 are established by the most important participant: the teacher. The asymmetry of the FL class is intensified because the teacher has the ability to communicate in L2 while the students' participation is restricted by their lack of proficiency in L2. In order to break this (asymmetry) the students tend to use L1 while the teacher maintains his/her position using the foreign language.

The rules for the use of English established by the two teachers in this study were different. At the beginning of the course, Teacher A decided that she would not use Portuguese in class and demanded the same position from her students. According to this teacher, speaking English is a matter of students' determination. In the interview, she commented about a student

who insisted on using Portuguese in class: "A postura dele diante disso (speaking in Portuguese) não mudou. Ele não se sente intimidado para falar português num momento em que ele não deveria falar." The use of English in class, in Teacher A's view, is also related to the aspirations of the teacher, who should feel proud when his/her students speak only English in class. In her words,

> Cê dá um puxão de orelha nele e de repente ele pára. Aluno tá acostumado a fazer, se o professor não corta, ele continua fazendo ... aluno pode ser vaidade do professor, se você molda a coisa ...".

With these rules established by the teacher, Section A students interacted in English most of the time.

Teacher A would usually supply the equivalent in English of words students said in Portuguese, as in Extract 4.1 and 4.2:

Extract 4.1

S1. E a matrícula?

T. Well, enrolment. In English we say enrolment, matrícula, enrolment. OK? You enrol for a course, right?

Extract 4.2

T. Are you tired Fernando?

S1. Com sono.

T. Sleepy. You are sleepy.

It is possible that at the beginning of the course, Section A students made more use of L1 in the class, because the teacher said to them at the end of the course, "In the beginning you couldn't carry on a conversation, and now it is hard for me to

stop you when you start speaking."

In the FL class, a context where students have to interact in L2, the students' participation may be blocked by the language. Bolognini (1991:63) reports a similar situation:

> Esse contexto apresentado de uma sala de língua estrangeira, entretanto, demonstra que os alunos não pedem esclarecimento ao professor. Ele não é interrompido e, no entanto, sabe que não foi compreendido.

There were two instances in the recording of Section A when the least proficient student, who could hardly speak English, stood up and went to the teacher's desk to talk to her in Portuguese because he did not dare to ask a question in LI in front of the class. This is an indication that the asymmetry is also present among the students, since they do not have the same proficiency level. The asymmetry between this student and the others makes him avoid speaking with the teacher in front of class. The use of English is an important value for the group and he did not want to expose himself as an unqualified person who did not belong to the group.

Teacher B had a different approach to the use of L2 in the classroom. First, her discourse in the classroom, usually in English, can be classified as teacher talk. Teacher talk is a kind of discourse that has elements to facilitate the comprehension by the students of the FL used by the teacher. The teacher adjusts the complexity of his/her discourse to the level of the students, so that they can understand. Allwright & Bailey (1991:140) question the usefulness of some characteristics of

teacher talk, because it is unlike the language students will encounter outside the classroom. A Section B student perceived that her teacher spoke in a different way: "A gente entende tudo o que ela fala. Ela tem um jeitinho, ela fala devagar. É bem pronunciado. É diferente da fita e da televisão." Besides the teacher talk, Teacher A also made use of Portuguese to facilitate her communication with the students.

The image Teacher B had of her class did not always correspond to what actually occurred in the classroom. In all the data analyzed I did not notice any insistence from the teacher for students to interact in L2. Nevertheless, she said in the interview, "Tem que ficar toda a hora chamando a atenção pra eles não falarem inglês, né?" (emphasis mine). This was apparently a slip of the tongue, as her intention appeared to be to say that she stimulated the students to use L2.

In Teacher B's view, Portuguese is often necessary because the students do not understand when she speaks English. As she said in the interview, "No meio da explicação eu tenho que passar para o português porque simplesmente tem gente que não entende uma palavra do que eu falo". The teacher often switched to Portuguese when a linguistic sign (a question, a non-understanding) or an extra linguistic sign (students not responding to her command, for example) made her perceive that the students did not understand. As a result of this acquiescence with the use of L1, at the end of the course teacher B was still giving instructions in Portuguese. Extract 4.3 and 4.4, from the reading test carried out at the end of the course,

demonstrate how the teacher used L1 to explain how students should take the test:

Extract 4.3

T. Com o pouco vocabulário que vocês têm, tem que fazer um jogo de compreensão. Ver o que tem no texto e o que vocês estão lendo. Eu não posso ajudar com vocabulário, tá?

S1.[incomprehensible].

T. Com relação a vocabulário eu não posso ajudar.

S1.[incomprehensible].

T. A questão é de assinalar.

Extract 4.4

S1. Pra quem colar ela pega com a câmera.

T. Ah se eu ver alguém olhando pro lado aí. Eu mudo a carteira. Fiquem bem quietinhos aí na folhinha de vocês. Ready?

According to Harbord (1992:351) the reason most commonly given by teachers for the use of L1 is an efficient use of time spent explaining in order to have more time for communicative activities. However, giving instructions for an activity constitutes one of the most authentic occasions for teacher-student communication in the classroom. In Extracts 4.3 and 4.4 above, the use of L1 saves time for students to take the test, but the real communication between the participants is carried out in L1.

In the long run, the use of L1 in Section B did not guarantee that there was more time for language learning activities. Table 3.1 in Chapter 3 shows the number of tasks carried out during

four classes. Section A carried out 56 tasks while Section B completed only 44. So, the time saved with the use of L1 in Section B is not reflected in the number of tasks carried out by the group. In Section A, the infrequent use of L1 seems not to have interfered in the group performance, since the students managed to carry out a greater number of tasks.

Although not mentioned by Teacher B, an important function she gives to the use of Portuguese is that of classroom management. In Chaudron's (1988:121) review of language choice, he draws attention to the opinion of experts that the fullest competence in the TL is achieved with a rich environment in the TL, including disciplinary and management operations. Teacher B does not take advantage of this opportunity. In Extract 4.5, for example, the teacher is arranging the groups for a task and makes a code switch, which creates an environment where students feel comfortable to use L1.

Extract 4.5

T. ... Kenia, Juliano and Mario. Já foi no outro grupo Mário? Então Kenia, Juliano and, tu não fosse ainda né? Então fica no grupo da Kenia, right? Carlos não foi ainda, né? Quem ficou agora?. Carlos? e João, João já foi? Só o Carlos ficou sobrando? Então Carlos fica no grupo deles aqui.

S1. Ainda bem que quem sobrou foi o Carlos não fui eu.

Teacher's language can influence the code used by the group. In the extract above the teacher switches to L1 causing the students to feel free to do the same.

In summary, the two teachers of this study established

different rules for the use of English in the classroom. Teacher A was very consistent with her own use of L2 and demanded the same attitude from the students. Only three students in the group showed difficulties in interacting in English.

Teacher B allowed the use of L1 in class. She used Portuguese for class management and to give instructions. No increase was perceived in the level of difficulty of her teacher talk during the course. The time saved with the use of L1 was not reflected in the number of tasks carried out by the class. Students were not sufficiently stimulated to use L2.

4.4.2. Students Behavior

In the video tapes of the classes, there are some moments when it is not possible to hear what the students are saying or which language they are speaking. However, I can perceive when they are using English because their behavior is different. For example, they speak more slowly, construct shorter sentences, exaggerate their body movements, make grimaces, show signs of uncertainty, stare at their classmates or look nowhere, as if this would help them to access words in their memory. The utterances are usually discontinuous and complemented with hesitation features such as ahhh, hummm.

This behavior can be observed in both sections, and it illustrates the students' difficulty in communicating in L2. A Section B student described in the interview what happens in such moments: "A gente não tá acostumado a pensar em inglês. E se a gente vai falar em inglês começa a demorar muito, então é mais

rápido falar em português. A gente tenta formar as frases em português para depois passar para o inglês." This demonstrates students' lack of proficiency and, as a consequence, how their relationship with the teacher was asymmetrical.

The asymmetrical relationship established in the classroom seems not to have disturbed the most inquisitive students, RA in Section A and PA in Section B. Their attitude may be associated with the fact that both students are teachers at the university. Hence, they did not feel intimidated in the classroom and clarified their doubts in order to make the input comprehensible to them, mainly negotiating meaning with the teacher.

In contrast, a less confident Section B student commented on his difficulty to ask the teacher questions when she is speaking: "A gente tem (medo) de perguntar uma besteira, ainda mais em inglês". This is an illustration of how the teacher-student relationship is already asymmetrical and that L2 makes it even more so. English acts as a barrier to be crossed by the students if they want to interact in the group. Students interact in L2 when they are forced to by the teacher's authority or when they feel safe to expose themselves in the group. In this aspect, the friendship which develops among classmates helps them to feel confident to interact in L2.

Another inquisitive student in Section B, when questioned about which language he used to ask the teacher questions, answered, "Eu pergunto em inglês quando eu sei, tipo perguntar uma palavra. Mas pergunta de gramática, assim, aí é mais difícil, então é em português que é pra não atrasar a aula". When the

student comes to a non-understanding, he avoids the negotiation of meaning in English because his lack of proficiency will stop the flow of the class. As the teacher allows the use of Portuguese, the student makes use of it.

Teacher B also commented that "quando estão trabalhando em grupo, eles quando podem falam em português". I observed that when in pair or group work the Section B students used one code (English) to perform the task proposed by the teacher, and the other code (Portuguese) to talk freely. Accordingly, one student reported, "A hora que a gente tá fazendo um exercício, quando acaba, não pinta conversa em inglês, e difícil." Another student commented, "A gente começa a papear e quando vai ver está conversando em português." However, a third student from the same section related that "nós conversamos assim sobre outras coisas, mas é sempre em inglês". Although there was not a rule that the interaction had to be in L2, there were participants who spontaneously interacted in English. It is possible that due to the age of the participants, most of them above 18, the teacher expected them to perceive the social norms of the classroom context in relation to which language they should use. The lack of reinforcement about the rules for language use, however, left the students free to adopt the code they chose.

In summary, the analysis of the video tapes shows students' behavior to be different depending on the language they are speaking. The difficulties in the use of L2 is confirmed by the students' statements about the extra effort imposed by the use of L2 at the moments they wanted to ask the teacher questions.

Comments about the use of L1 in class came mostly from Section B students who more frequently used Portuguese in class.

4.4.3. Code Switching Functions

The instances of code switching present in the data have different functions in the specific social context of the classroom. The functions identified here are (1) to mark the beginning of the class; (2) to ask/provide meaning equivalents in L1 or L2; (3) to facilitate understanding of new linguistic items (4) to protect students' rights; and (5) to maintain the planned structure of the class. The analysis of these functions evaluates how code switching, any move from L1 to L2 or from L2 to L1, reflects the asymmetry of the teacher-student relationship.

Before the beginning of the classes the students were always talking in Portuguese. In Section A there was a friendlier atmosphere and students were more talkative. The beginning of the class, in both sections, was always marked by a code switch made by the teacher, who would start speaking in the FL. This is the most important switch from LI to L2, and it marks the beginning of the class.

The lack of knowledge of L2 was the most frequent cause for a code switch, and led to different situations: students would ask the teacher or a classmate how to say a word in English; a participant would translate a word into Portuguese; the teacher would explain the meaning of a word and somebody would translate it. In Extract 4.6 a student of Section A uses Portuguese to ask for a word in English. Once the equivalent is supplied by his

classmate. S1 clarifies the spelling of the word.

Extract 4.6.

S1. How can I say troco?

S2. Change.

S1. Change?

S2. Yeah.

S1. Like change the money?

In Extract 4.7 there is an example of Teacher A making use of Portuguese while correcting the use of the expression 'Thank God'

Extract 4.7

T. Thanks God.

S1. Thanks Got I'm doing journalism.

T. Thanks God means 'Graças a Deus'.

The teacher translates the expression to clarify the word God instead of got. The use of L1 by Teacher A was not common, and it may be related to the level of individualization in teacher-student interaction (Chaudron 1988:122). In Extract 4.7 Teacher A is assisting a pair of students and leaves the rules aside to translate an expression. The exception may be associated with the individuality of the routine, teacher with only two students.

In two situations Section A students made use of Portuguese to defend their rights; that is, when they felt intimidated by the teacher, they broke the rule and switched to Portuguese to protect themselves. In the example in Extract 4.8, the teacher is talking about the university strike that is about to start.

Extract 4.8

T. OK people. Something I want to talk about with you: the strike.

S1. Strike?

T. The strike. Yes. I talked to professora Arlene, the coordinator of this course, and she said that we teachers from extra curricular are not going to stop. So, I'm not going to stop.

S2. Eu vou fala em português. Eu vou fala bem claro, porque eu já peguei greve aqui no extra curricular...

S2 feels that the group is about to face the inconvenience of a strike; he decides to make a code switch in order to clarify possible troubles. For him, L2 is not a trustable code to deal with this type of issue. In Extract 4.9 the function of the code switch is also defense of the students' rights. The teacher is collecting the money to pay the xerox copies. There is a confusion about who has not paid yet. The trouble was caused because the students had counted me as student. The non-understanding leads S2 (Ana Ligia) to change to Portuguese to protect herself.

Extract 4.9

T. Some people didn't pay?

Ss. No.

T. Who didn't pay? So, let me note down, you see?
And you were quiet, you didn't say anything. See?

S1 (Simone). Next class.

T. Yes, you can pay next class.

Simone, Ana Ligia, and ...

S2. NÃO, NÃO. Eu já paguei na aula passada.

Atkinson) defends the use of the mother tongue in the classroom to allow students say what they want. In the two extracts above the students break the social norm of the group and use Portuguese because they wanted to protect their rights. Although the bibliography does not mention students feeling threatened as a possibility for a code switch, it may be important to equalize the asymmetrical teacher-student relationship with a code switch, so that students can feel more confident about defending their rights.

While the students use a code switch to the L1 to defend their rights, by equalizing the asymmetrical relationship, the teachers appear to use a code switch to the L2 in order to maintain their authority, i. e., the asymmetrical relationship. In Extract 4.10, the Section A students had given the teacher a sheet of paper to read in the beginning of the class. While she read, the students were talking in Portuguese because the class had not formally started yet, therefore, the code had not been switched. The interesting aspect of this example is that each party wants to keep their code, the students LI and the teacher L2.

Extract 4.10

T. Why Associação Catarinense de Idosos?

S1. Isso aí é da OAB.

T. Why are they ...

S2. Eles é que tomaram a iniciativa.

T. So [incomprehensible]. Yes?

S3. Oh professora. Olha a democracia nisso aí. Ninguém é obrigado a votá.

T. I agree with you. I myself never vote. I always justify.

S3. Imagina só se ninguém votá. Num outro presidente ruim, daí ninguém vota.

T. Yes, yes. So let me hand something in.

The L1 is adopted by the students in a conversation about mandatory vote. They wanted to persuade the teacher to sign a document against it. The L2 makes it difficult for the students to convince the teacher, so they keep using L1. The teacher perceives that she can not make them use English in that conversation: she make use of her authority and changes the topic and the activity, which leads the students to switch codes.

Although Teacher B was in general less strict about the use of L2, there was also an instance where she used a code switch to maintain authority. Teacher B often used L1 to organize the activities or give instructions. During the instructions for the final test, however, she started the explanations in L2. When two students asked questions in L1, the teacher answered using L1, making the conversation symmetrical. As the students were anxious about the test, many of them spoke at the same time, interfering with the teacher's explanations. The teacher switched to L2, immediately silencing the group. In English, only two members of the group asked questions about the test. This is evidence that the use of L1 can make the teacher-student relationship more

symmetrical, but this symmetry may lead the event to have characteristics not desired by the teacher. The symmetry became inopportune. The teacher then used her power and switched the code in order to follow the planned structure of the class.

In the instances of code switching present in this corpus, the following functions were identified: (1) to mark the beginning of the class; (2) to ask/supply meaning equivalents in L1 or L2; (3) to facilitate understanding of new linguistic items; (4) to protect students' rights; and (5) to maintain the structure of the lesson. During (1) and (5) the teacher tries to keep the asymmetry of the event; and during (3) and (4) students try to break the asymmetry.

4.5. Conclusions

Based on the analysis of the four classes selected for this part of the study, it can be concluded that (1) the rules for language choice are established in the group by the teacher, who may use her authority to get students to overcome their initial resistance to the use of L2 in class; (2) the asymmetrical teacher-student relationship is intensified by the use of L2 in the classroom, but the use of L2 favors acquisition; (3) students' behavior alters depending on the code they are using.

Teacher A, who established the use of L2 as a norm for classroom interaction had, at the end of the semester, a group in which almost all the students interacted and solved their non-understandings in L2, whereas in Section B the use of L1 may be associated with a general weak communicative competence.

Concerning the social interaction of the group, Teacher A had a conversational style in which participants had an equal right to determine the topic (or the activity - May 26), initiate and take turns during the conversation. This type of symmetry and flexibility resembles real communication. However, as Rech points out (Rech 1992:58), the teacher who adopts the conversational style may on some occasions need to assume a more formal attitude and shock the students who do not expect him/her to act like that. Although the context and participants of this study are different, the symmetry and conversational style adopted by Teacher A was also sometimes interrupted, for example, when she pushed a student while charging for the xerox and the student switched to Portuguese.

Teacher B had a different teaching style, more similar to the formal style described by Rech (1992), in which the teachers represent the discourse of the institution in which they work. Teacher B was worried because the institution was not acting as she thought it should.

Chapter 5 presents a brief summary of the study, the conclusions drawn from it, and some of the implications it may have for the foreign language classroom.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM

5.1. Summary of the Questions Investigated

During this ethnographic study of two sections of English as a foreign language, the idea of interaction as an essential part of the process of language acquisition has been developed and exemplified. The analysis focused on two main aspects of interaction, the level of negotiation of meaning during different tasks and code switching during the class, since the use of L1 is a strategy that students use to avoid negotiation of meaning.

Chapter 1 presented a review of ethnographic research in the L2 classroom and introduced some elements of this study: context of the school, the participants and the several methods used for data collection.

In Chapter 2, I defined interaction and discussed the role of interaction in the Input Hypothesis, the Output Hypothesis and the Interaction Hypothesis for language acquisition (Ellis 1990).

In Chapter 3, the analysis of the interaction of the group was carried out by identifying the instances of negotiation of meaning among the participants. The level of negotiation of meaning during each task was determined according to a subjective rating scale, based on the analysis of the discourse produced by the interlocutors. The moments in which they tried to negotiate meaning by clarifying, modifying, repeating, asking for clarification, and so on were recognized and the level of interaction quantified. It was observed that through negotiation

of meaning, learners are not only communicating, but they are also trying to improve the quality of the input they receive and the quality of the output they produce.

As the use of L1 in class frequently arose from avoidance of negotiation of meaning in L2, an analysis of the moments of code switching were carried out in Chapter 4. This investigation led to some conclusions about the role of the teacher in the establishment of the rules for the use L1 and L2 in the classroom; the behavior of the students concerning the use of L1 and L2; and the reasons for the code switching.

5.2. Conclusions

The main concern of this study is to investigate how interaction can influence the acquisition of a foreign language. The conclusions presented here resulted from the analysis of the tasks which promote more negotiation of meaning and the analysis of the influence of the use of L1 and L2 in the interaction of the groups.

The following conclusions were drawn from the analysis of the level of NM promoted by different tasks: (1) it is necessary to have oral tasks in order to have instances of NM; (2) accountability is an important task because it is the moment when students' production is checked by the teacher; 3) the constant use of L2 and working with different classmates favor the occurrence of NM; (4) during pair/group work, convergent tasks promote more NM than divergent tasks; (5) the sequence of tasks appears to be more relevant than the type of the task for

determining the level of NM; (6) in spite of the activities, there are learners who do not verbalize a non-understanding, however, they can demonstrate their difficulties through kinesics, looking up words in a dictionary, or checking their books and notebooks.

The NM was successful in the instances of NM analyzed, except the ones when the participants preferred switching codes instead of negotiating meaning. The relationship between NM and acquisition, however, can not be determined through this study, because the students were not tested after a NM routine to check whether they had acquired the linguistic item previously negotiated. Nevertheless, I would like to elaborate more about what is involved in a NM. A NM routine in the foreign language classroom involves two participants: the one who points out a non-understanding and shows an interest in learning or understanding something, a necessary behavior in the learning process; and the other participant, who has to restate or to improve the accuracy of his/her utterance. The act of improving the accuracy of an utterance, according to Swain's Output Hypothesis (1986) is essential for learning. So, an instance of NM involves not only the acquisition of a new linguistic item, but other strategies that are relevant to the language learning process such as students initiation, their search for comprehension and their attempt to improve output quality.

Further studies may compare the effect on foreign language acquisition of interaction with negotiation and that without negotiation, in order to check the level of acquisition promoted

by the negotiation.

Based on the analysis of the four classes selected for this part of the study, the following conclusions can be drawn regarding language choice in the foreign language classroom:

(1) Discouraging the use of LI in the foreign language classroom may, at first, make the classroom interaction more difficult. During the course, however, the students get used to the rules and start to interact only in L2. It is the teacher's role to establish, formally or not, in which language the interaction is to occur in the classroom. The model of the teacher is important for the students, who can perceive how the teacher makes use of L2 to interact with the group and negotiate meaning when required.

(2) The asymmetry of the teacher-student relationship is emphasized by the use of L2, and the students tend to use L1 to ensure a better position in the relationship. The students interact in L2 when they feel safe to expose themselves in the group, and when the whole class shares the same code. At the moments the students feel their positions threatened, they do not hesitate in making a code switch to protect their rights or to save face. The teachers also make use of the language to guarantee their positions in the class, switching the code to L2 when they feel their authority threatened.

(3) Interaction in L2 is not so fluent, due to the moments of non-understanding. The students' difficulties may be observed in their behavior. Nevertheless, using L2 to solve their non-understandings the students learn how to construct their

knowledge and the rules for real communication in L2. On the other hand, when the teacher uses teacher talk and allows L1 to facilitate the communication in the classroom, the process of language acquisition may take longer, because students do not have the chance to improve their skills in L2. The participants do(not) negotiate meaning when they come to a non-understanding because they (can) use L1. In this way, learners do not make an effort to understand their classmates or to produce utterances in L2 that are comprehensible. The frequent and unjustified use of L1 has a negative effect in language acquisition according to the principles of the Interaction Hypothesis.

The benefits from the use of L2 overcome the inconvenience of the asymmetry, as can be seen in this study. Teacher A was very demanding about the use of L2; however, it did not have a damaging effect in the teacher-student relationship. Section A students submitted a petition to the coordinator of the course requesting to have the same teacher in the following semester, and Section A students seemed to be better able to communicate in L2 by the end of the course.

Future studies in the field of language choice might investigate other functions of L1 use in less proficient groups or the effect of learners' age on language choice. However, most important is the study of the effect of L1 and L2 use on the acquisition of the target language.

The methodology used for this study involved me during the whole research, and some of my conclusions are about this

methodology - ethnography.

Observing these two sections of English for a total of 30 hours, transcribing the tapes, analyzing the data was a significant experience for me as a teacher. The great opportunity of observing other teachers has taught me a lot about being a teacher, teaching and learning. This experience has actually influenced my classes and my view of the learning process.

The methodology allows the researcher to investigate a real situation, for a long period, and after that watch and rewatch that product as many times as desired in order to conduct the analysis. However, the data collection became limited by frequent pair and group work, during which it is necessary to focus on one pair or group.

The researcher should be open and sensitive to see what is happening among the participants of the group. The subjective interpretation of the data, a feature of ethnographic research, shows a belief in human capacity to interpret our society. We do not need to believe only in numbers, rather the researcher's interpretation should also be accepted as valid.

5.3. Implications for the Classroom

My first suggestion is that teachers should always encourage learners to initiate requests, questions, or topics in the class. Teachers should give space for the students' voices to be heard in the classroom and try to involve as many students as possible in the activities. Special attention should be given to learners who avoid NM and do not verbalize a non-understanding.

Although teachers may not feel comfortable being corrected in class, a teacher's mistake or admission of doubt may promote instances of good negotiation where the students take the turn of the one who has the knowledge. Thus, these moments may have a positive effect in the interaction of the group.

Interaction may influence the organization of the class, so it is the teacher's role to find a balance between the organization he/she has planned for a class and how that organization comes about with the group interaction. It is important to encourage students to continue their conversations and to clarify their doubts, but the teacher usually cannot leave the syllabus aside.

Teachers should know the objective of the course they are teaching and reflect about their practice. The way the teacher works in the classroom exposes some beliefs and goals that sometimes do not match the ones he/she claims to maintain. Only through reflection about his/her practice can the teacher perceive the difference between what he/she thinks and what he/she does. This reflection can include an evaluation of the activities carried out during the classes to check whether they meet the goals of the course.

When the goals of the course include oral production, it is important to provide activities which promote a high level of NM, such as: (1) pair work activities; (2) convergent activities in which students have to exchange information in order to reach a common goal; (3) activities to check reading/listening comprehension to verify how students have interacted with the

input they received; (4) activities to check students' output to assure that it has the quality expected by the teacher; (5) activities that fit students' linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the world; (6) activities which involve a degree of challenge or language which contain structure a little beyond the learners' level of competence.

Another issue to be pondered by teachers is their tolerance to imperfect output, which does not encourage learners to negotiate meaning and have a better production. Teachers should be explicit about the rules concerning the quality of the output expected from the students, for each type of activity. In some, the teacher should be demanding concerning students' production, while in others the teacher can be more liberal. The common background allows participants to understand each other with their 'common' mistakes. One of the objectives of NM is the effort that learners make to improve their production in order to be understood, so, it is the teacher's role to suggest frequent change of pairs since it appears to stimulate a better production.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

INSTRUMENT FOR OBSERVATION

Data:

Group: Unit:

A. Checklist

Observed behavior. During the following activities, what was the level of interaction (negotiation of meaning) among the participants?

Rating:

no interaction 1 2 3 4 5 good interaction

1. Informal chat in the beginning of the class.
2. Grammar explanation
3. Presentation of new task
4. Warming-up for reading
5. Reading
6. Checking reading comprehension
7. Warming-up for writing
8. Writing
9. Copying
10. Listening
11. Checking listening comprehension
12. Accuracy task - pair work
13. Accuracy task - group work
14. Accuracy task - teacher centered
15. Role play
16. Fluency task - pair work
17. Fluency task - group work
18. Fluency task - teacher centered
19. Oral drill
20. Accountability

APPENDIX B

Questionário para Identificação dos Alunos

1. Nome_____

2. Rua_____N°__Bairro _____ Cep_____

Fone _____

3. Há quanto tempo estuda inglês? _____

4. Por que você estuda inglês? _____

_____

5. Você aceita participar de uma entrevista sobre o seu aprendizado de inglês? _____

6. Qual a habilidade (falar, ouvir, escrever, ler) que você tem mais interesse em aprender? Por que? _____

_____

7. Que tipo de atividade, em aula ou em casa, faz você aprender mais inglês? _____

_____

8. Qual a melhor parte da aula? _____

_____

9. Qual o significado que a palavra interação tem para você?

_____